

MCLAREN SPECIAL

AUTOSPORT

Secrets of McLaren's newest title winner

Under the skin of the MCL39



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DECEMBER 2025

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MCLAREN'S GREATEST?

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE
GROUND-EFFECT ERA





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- . Raced in period by Riccardo Patrese
- . Scored Championship points in 4 races, including a second place at Hungaroring
- . Designed and developed by legendary Formula 1 men such as Ross Brawn and Rory Byrne
- . Offered as a decommissioned show car

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- . Finished 3rd in the 2014 Blancpain GT Championship
- . Finished 4th OA at the Spa 24 Hours
- . Raced exclusively by famous French racing team Saintéloc
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- . Fabulous and very reliable V10 5.2L engine
- . Eye catching period FIFA livery



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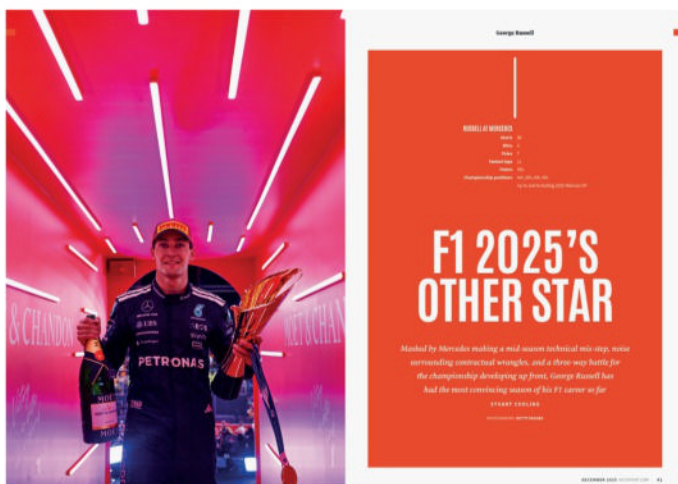
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McLAREN



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McLaren is only the second team in history to rack up 10 constructors' championships in Formula 1



SHANISZLO/NURPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES

Celebrating McLaren's fine achievement

Just 18 months ago, there was no reason to think that the last two seasons of the ground-effect era in Formula 1 would feature anything other than more Red Bull domination. Twenty-one wins from 22 races in 2023 and four from the first five of 2024 suggested we'd have to wait until the next ruleset before anyone other than Max Verstappen got to shoot for the world title.

McLaren's remarkable turnaround since its poor start to 2023, not to mention strong if inconsistent cameos from Ferrari and Mercedes, has changed all that. The MCL39 has already delivered a second consecutive constructors' crown for McLaren and Jake Boxall-Legge explains how the car came about, plus its key strengths, on page 24.

Great people are required to create great cars, and McLaren boss Zak Brown tells Stuart Codling what inspires him and how he has helped turn the team around (p36). It's interesting to note how much of the success has been achieved with the same staff that lived through the nadir of 2016.

Ron Dennis changed McLaren – and F1 – during the 1980s and two cars from his era go head-to-head this month. The MP4/4, which famously took 15 wins from 16 races in 1988, is often cited as the greatest F1 McLaren, but we reckon the MP4/2 should have something to say about that (p42)...

While Verstappen has been the driver to give McLaren pair Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri the most trouble in 2025, George Russell has been the other star of the F1 season. We take a look at his campaign and place within Mercedes on p60.

There's been much talk about the 2026 regulations but what about the outgoing ground-effect era? We assess just how much of a success the 2022-25 period has *really* been on p52.

Elsewhere, Marcus Simmons explores the big changes that are happening to the junior single-seater ladder (p78), Gary Watkins interviews IMSA champion Matt Campbell (p92), and Tom Howard hears from World Rally star Kalle Rovanpera about the Finn's racing switch and dreams of reaching F1 (p104).

We also bring you season reviews of the major UK series and celebrate the Walter Hayes Trophy in our National section (p114).

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Correction

The picture of Tazio Nuvolari and Achille Varzi shaking hands on page 53 of the November issue had an incorrect credit. It should have been The Spitzley Zagari Archive. We apologise for the error.



Kevin Turner

Kevin Turner
Chief Editor

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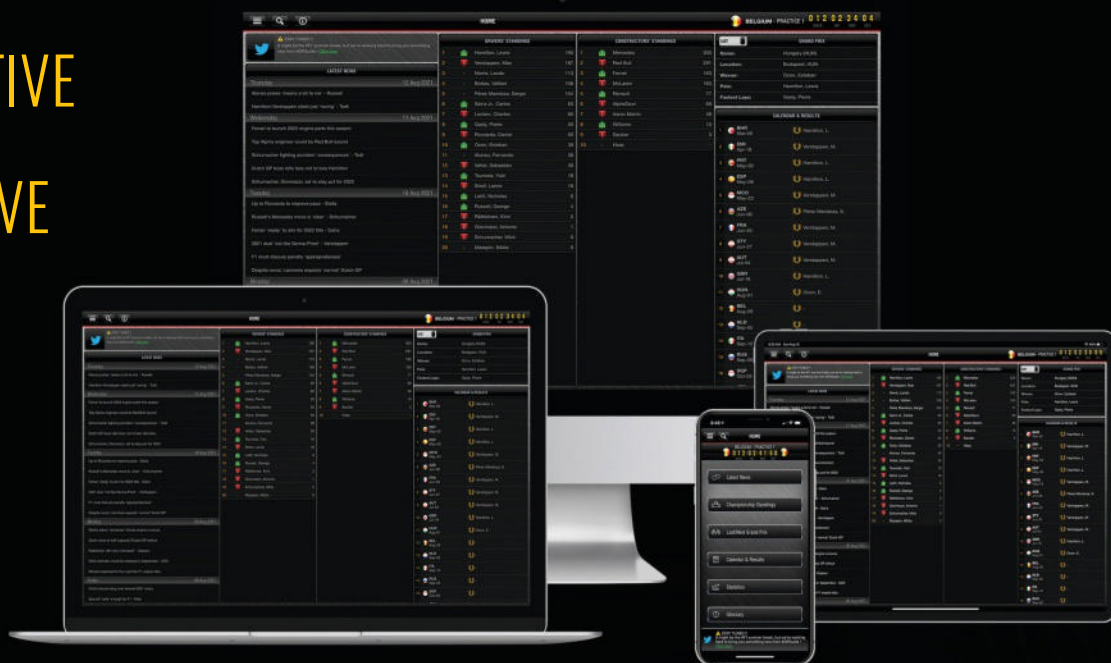


GRAND PRIX GUIDE



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Taking a turn for the worse

Chaos erupts in the first corner of the United States Grand Prix sprint race as the field scatters following the multi-car clash that eliminated the McLarens of Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri, plus Fernando Alonso's Aston Martin, required Nico Hulkenberg to seek a

replacement for his Sauber's smashed front wing, and also forced Alonso's team-mate Lance Stroll and Alpine driver Franco Colapinto to pit. The safety car was summoned, the stewards declared "no further action", and once racing resumed

Max Verstappen's Red Bull scooped the win. He followed that with the same result in the next day's main event, revitalising the Dutchman's once moribund-appearing title defence. For the full story, see our race debrief on page 12.



Photographer Jared C Tilton/
Getty Images

Where Circuit of The Americas, Texas, USA
When Saturday 18 October 2025

Details Canon EOS R1,
RF100-300mm lens, 1/1300th @ F4





Tsunoda's taste of Honda history

Sixty years after Richie Ginther drove the Honda RA272 to the Japanese manufacturer's maiden Formula 1 victory in Mexico, Red Bull driver Yuki Tsunoda took to the track in the V12-powered machine for a mellifluous and nostalgia-rich Sunday morning jaunt ahead of October's Mexican Grand Prix. Tsunoda had previously enjoyed a run in the RA272 at last year's Goodwood Festival of Speed, relating then how when he "revved the engine... the pleasant vibration seemed to sink into my bones", and "the directness of the car and the sense of being as one are things that cannot be experienced in modern cars". Having obviously enjoyed his recent experience, he summarised it as "a very special and proud moment".

Photographer Zak Mauger/
LAT Images/Getty Images

Where Mexico City, Mexico

When Sunday 26 October 2025

Details Canon EOS R1,
RF400mm lens, 1/1600th @ F4.5



Verstappen runs out of room

Four-wide into Turn1 at the Autodromo Hermanos Rodriguez at the start of the Mexican Grand Prix, while visually arresting, was never going to resolve itself without at least one car taking to the run-off. And here, alongside the McLaren of Lando Norris and

Ferrari team-mates Charles Leclerc and Lewis Hamilton and already sending up a dust cloud on the outside kerb before the impending excursion, it's the Red Bull of Max Verstappen in full-send mode. As things turned out, it wasn't going to be the only time during

the course of the afternoon that his meticulously crafted RB21 would double as a very expensive lawn-mower, although he escaped sanction, unlike Hamilton following their argy-bargy on lap six, and finished a strong third. Race debrief, page 14.



Photographer Clive Rose/
Getty Images/Red Bull Content Pool

Where Mexico City, Mexico
When Sunday 26 October 2025

Details Canon EOS R1,
RF400mm lens, 1/3200th @ F2.8



Sprint race win followed by grand prix victory edges Verstappen back into title fight

BAGNALL/SUTTON IMAGES

FORMULA 1

A BAD COUPLE OF DAYS AT THE RANCH FOR MCLAREN AS VERSTAPPEN WINS AGAIN

Amid such Texas staples as cowboy hats and every slow-cooked cut of beef you could imaginably eat, Max Verstappen edged ominously closer to making the unlikely likely. McLaren remains committed to letting its drivers race each other, rather than tipping the scales towards Oscar Piastri or Lando Norris – though Piastri left the United States with his championship lead substantially diminished and no longer benefiting from the “repercussions” placed on Norris after the first-lap incident in Singapore.

McLaren’s downward spiral began with a so-so performance by Piastri in sprint qualifying, third fastest but a telling three tenths down on polesitter Max Verstappen, who pipped Norris to the spot by just 0.071 seconds. Verstappen’s lap was all the more remarkable because he had

lost time with a snap of oversteer at the exit of Turn 1, then regained the deficit and more around a circuit whose medium-speed corners weren’t expected to favour his Red Bull RB21.

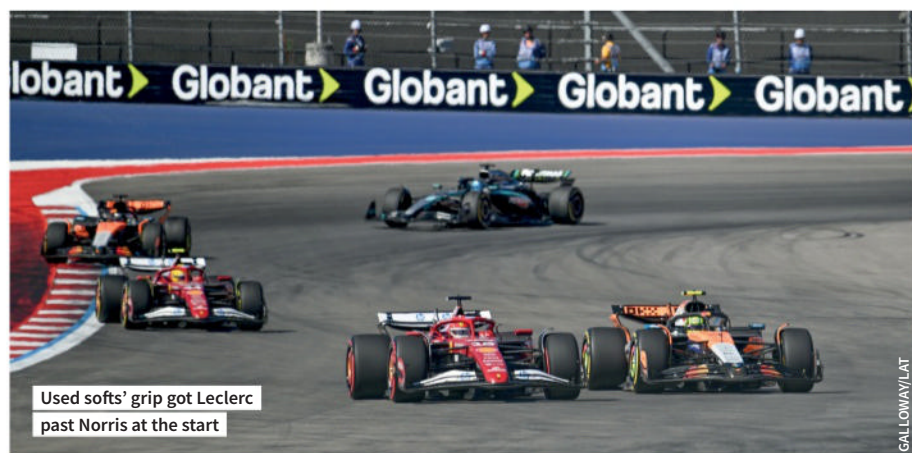
Red Bull revealed that it had trialled two different set-ups across its two cars to alleviate their tendency to bottom out in fast corners, wearing the plank to critical levels. The set-up tested on Yuki Tsunoda’s car judged to be more optimal, and ported over to Verstappen’s ahead of sprint qualifying. From there he did the business with his usual aggression, chasing that first-corner loss through his final Q3 lap, exiting the penultimate turn (now renamed ‘Andretti corner’, where a plaque declares Mario to be the first American world champion; let’s hope that’s not a ‘Hill’ the circuit owners are prepared to die on) just 0.031s off Norris’s time. Verstappen

carried more speed into the final corner than Norris and stopped the clock fractionally earlier.

The compounding factor for McLaren’s woes occurred seconds into the sprint race, where Norris got off to a slightly slower start on the dustier side of the grid and tried to balance the books by being ultra-assertive into Turn 1. Piastri, cut off on the outside line, tried a karting-style cutback with a view to getting more momentum into Turn 2, but in the heat of the moment had failed to account for other cars also colonising that space, including Nico Hulkenberg’s Sauber and Fernando Alonso’s Aston Martin. The resulting squeeze and collision led to Piastri spinning and taking out his own team-mate. Verstappen had the rest of the race to himself, apart from a spirited dive by George Russell that came to naught.

McLaren’s first instinct was to blame Hulkenberg for being there, a frankly ridiculous proposition. CEO Zak Brown, who initially complained about “amateur driving”, quickly retracted his words having reviewed the incident, and apologised in person to both Hulkenberg and Sauber team principal Jonathan Wheatley. McLaren team principal Andrea Stella continued to lament “experienced drivers” acting with “imprudence”.

Internally, Piastri was felt to be sufficiently culpable for McLaren to withdraw the sanctions imposed on Norris after his actions in Singapore. It’s understood that Piastri had been given first choice on running times in qualifying;



Used softs' grip got Leclerc past Norris at the start

GALLOWAY/LAT

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES

if so, he didn't make the most of his window of opportunity.

While the sprint-race washout wasn't too costly in terms of points – another eight in the swing towards Verstappen – the loss of track time exacted a higher penalty as both Norris and Piastri made heavy weather of qualifying. Norris rallied to go second, behind Verstappen again, albeit by 0.3s this time, while Piastri scraped through Q2 and could do no better than sixth.

Missing the sprint race carried a consequence into the grand prix, too. F1's grandees have become fixated upon the idea of getting rid of practice, claiming that fans find it boring. But what have the sprints been this year if not for some first-lap *carambolage*, followed by a tediously processional long-run simulation dressed up as a race? McLaren therefore missed having some decent running on the medium-compound tyres, which was essential given that Pirelli was skipping a 'step' in its harder compounds, bringing the C1 instead of the C2. Based on Friday's running, the pace differential between the hard and the medium was estimated at an eye-watering 1.9s. By Saturday Pirelli was breathing a palpable sigh of relief and saying that figure was more like 1.5s, which put the C1 back in the game as a race tyre.

This panned out as unconvincingly as it sounded, and the three runners at the back of the grid who started on hards – Alex Albon, Esteban Ocon and Isack Hadjar – did not prosper. When the warmers came off, third-placed Charles Leclerc was the outlier in starting on used softs rather than fresh mediums, but he made the most of the grippier rubber to beat Norris to Turn 1 and give Verstappen something to think about.

Thereafter it became a question of how long Leclerc could whisper to a set of tyres that had already seen one usage cycle. The answer, as it happened, was a very long time: 22 laps, within 10 of when the medium-shod runners expected to make the change. By that point Leclerc had already done the damage to Norris's prospects – Verstappen was well up the road and, while the McLaren driver had been moderately assertive in trying to pass the Ferrari, he was far too predictable, enabling Leclerc for the most part to meander into his path before Norris took each swing. It took him until lap 21 to get by.

"I knew it was an aggressive strategy," Leclerc explained. "My plan was to be first after the first corner. I didn't quite make that, but at least I gained a position, which helped me a little bit with free air, and that definitely helped our race. Again, I knew it was aggressive, but considering the feeling I had on the hard in FP1, I was quite convinced I didn't want to touch that tyre."

The stop dropped Leclerc to ninth on track



Piastri conceded he'd had a sub-par weekend

but, importantly, he emerged ahead of a gaggle of traffic led by Alonso – and he had effectively forced Norris to extend his first stint and try to build a tyre offset for his final stint on softs. So Leclerc could bring his new mediums in gently before he picked off Hulkenberg, Ollie Bearman and Tsunoda, then proceeded to second again as others pitted ahead.

Having stopped on lap 32, Norris was back on Leclerc's rear by the end of lap 36, but once again the Ferrari would not be displaced easily. Norris got to the point where he felt his tyres were shot and was ready to capitulate, but race engineer Will Joseph suggested backing off for a couple of laps to get the temperatures under control. As lap 50 ended Norris closed on the Ferrari's rear, launched successfully up the inside into Turn 1, only for Leclerc to cut back and get the better exit line – take note, Oscar, it works when there aren't any other cars there...

Norris then stayed on Leclerc's tail through the Esses and sneaked up the inside as they entered the back straight. By then, Verstappen was too far away. Piastri, meanwhile, had managed to oust Russell from fifth on the opening lap but could do nothing about Lewis Hamilton in fourth, until Hamilton's suspected puncture on the final lap got him into range.

"I've not felt particularly comfortable the whole weekend," said Piastri, "so definitely some things to try and understand. But I feel like with the pace I had I did the most that I could."

STUART CODLING



For ratings of all the drivers go to [autosport.com/f1/driver-ratings](https://www.autosport.com/f1/driver-ratings)



RESULTS ROUND 19/24

AUSTIN
19.10.25 / 56 LAPS



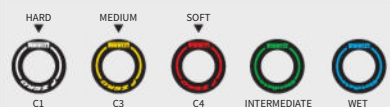
POS	DRIVER	TIME	GRID
1	Max Verstappen Red Bull-Honda RBPT RB21	1h34m00.161s	1
2	Lando Norris McLaren-Mercedes MCL39	+7.959s	2
3	Charles Leclerc Ferrari SF-25	+15.373s	3
4	Lewis Hamilton Ferrari SF-25	+28.536s	5
5	Oscar Piastri McLaren-Mercedes MCL39	+29.678s	6
6	George Russell Mercedes F1 W16	+33.456s	4
7	Yuki Tsunoda Red Bull-Honda RBPT RB21	+52.714s	13
8	Nico Hulkenberg Sauber-Ferrari C45	+57.249s	11
9	Ollie Bearman Haas-Ferrari VF-25	+1m04.722s	8
10	Fernando Alonso Aston Martin-Mercedes AMR25	+1m10.001s	10
11	Liam Lawson Racing Bulls-Honda RBPT VCARB 02	+1m13.209s	12
12	Lance Stroll Aston Martin-Mercedes AMR25	+1m14.778s	19
13	Andrea Kimi Antonelli Mercedes F1 W16	+1m15.746s	7
14	Alexander Albon Williams-Mercedes FW47	+1m20.000s	18
15	Esteban Ocon Haas-Ferrari VF-25	+1m23.043s	17
16	Isack Hadjar Racing Bulls-Honda RBPT VCARB 02	+1m32.807s	20
17	Franco Colapinto Alpine-Renault A525	-1 lap/+2.307s	15
18	Gabriel Bortoleto Sauber-Ferrari C45	-1 lap/+3.557s	16
19	Pierre Gasly Alpine-Renault A525	-1 lap/+6.155s	14
R	Carlos Sainz Williams-Mercedes FW47	5 laps/accident	9

FASTEST LAP Antonelli 1m37.577s (126.384mph)

F1 SPRINT 19 LAPS (GRID)

1 Verstappen (1); 2 Russell (5); 3 Sainz (7); 4 Hamilton (8); 5 Leclerc (10); 6 Albon (9); 7 Tsunoda (18); 8 Antonelli (11); 9 Lawson (15); 10 Gasly (13).

TYRE COMPOUNDS USED



DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP

1 Piastri 346; 2 Norris 332; 3 Verstappen 306; 4 Russell 252; 5 Leclerc 192; 6 Hamilton 142; 7 Antonelli 89; 8 Albon 73; 9 Hulkenberg 41; 10 Hadjar 39.

CONSTRUCTORS' CHAMPIONSHIP

1 McLaren 678; 2 Mercedes 341; 3 Ferrari 334; 4 Red Bull 331; 5 Williams 111; 6 Racing Bulls 72; 7 Aston Martin 69; 8 Sauber 59; 9 Haas 48; 10 Alpine 20.



Norris capitalised on having a car that gave him “a little bit more of what I need”

POTTS/LAT

FORMULA 1

PIASTRI’S CHAMPIONSHIP LEAD GOES SLIP-SLIDING AWAY AS NORRIS DOMINATES

Jacques Villeneuve, himself no stranger to making heavy weather of winning the world championship in the fastest car, reckons Lando Norris’s struggles earlier in the season made Oscar Piastri “complacent”, that Norris has “stepped up” post-Baku in response to Max Verstappen’s competitive renaissance, and that Piastri “is not stepping up [because] he was already at his limit”. Well, that’s one way of reading recent events, culminating in a double-header in the Americas in which Norris overturned Piastri’s championship lead while Verstappen drew ominously close. Rather less sensationalist takes prevail on the McLaren pitwall.

Mexico City was another venue where Piastri was unable to take his usual trajectory of starting slightly off his team-mate’s pace, then building to a peak at the right point during the weekend. As with the US GP at Austin, Pirelli supplied hard and medium-compound tyres a step apart, trying to provide an impetus for some strategic variety; but, like the previous weekend, the white-walled rubber was barely seen outside Friday’s first practice session when the track was at its ‘greenest’. That made for a fraught qualifying session as the track evolved rapidly during Q1, to a point where the entire field was split by just eight tenths of a second, requiring the majority of the runners to go again.

In Q3, Norris claimed pole position by a commanding margin from the Ferraris of Charles Leclerc and Lewis Hamilton, with

George Russell’s Mercedes fourth and Verstappen fifth. Red Bull had arrived with another new floor iteration for Verstappen this weekend – a modified version of an existing floor – and was again pushing the limits of what was achievable with set-up. Piastri was eighth, a yawning half-second gap off Norris, and lucky that seventh-fastest Carlos Sainz was due a five-place grid penalty carried over from Austin.

How to interpret that half-second gap? Predictably, McLaren team principal Andrea Stella’s response was more data-driven than Villeneuve’s in the realm of amateur psychology, or the other theories in circulation to the effect that something is inherently wrong with Piastri’s car after the collision in the Austin sprint.

“Every evidence, every piece of data, every indirect measurement of information we have

tells us that there is no problem with the car, and we have no reason to suspect that that’s the case,” said Stella. “Also the change of the chassis, I know that in the history of F1 there is this topic of changing the chassis. I would change other components than the chassis, like the floor, the front wing, but in reality there is a rotation of parts, so it’s not like there is always the same parts on the car. So we have reasons to be reassured that there is no problem with the car.”

Stella’s verdict was that Piastri and Norris have different skillsets, and Piastri tends to struggle in low-grip conditions. When the car is sliding around there is a balance to be struck between leaning on the car a little more, thereby finding lap time, and sliding too much, which can cause a spike in the surface temperature of the tyres. Piastri’s instinctive aversion to letting



Late VSC saved Leclerc’s second place from Verstappen’s advances

GERARDO VIEIRA/NURPHOTO

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES



Bearman's drive to fourth place provided feel-good story of the race

the car slide means he loses fractions of a second per corner, compounding into a bigger deficit at the end of the lap. The effect was just more pronounced in Mexico, since the Autodromo Hermanos Rodriguez is the lowest-grip track on the calendar, on account of its 'closed' surface and the scarcity of other racing fixtures here.

The relatively long drag to Turn 1 usually makes for peril on the opening lap of grands prix in Mexico City, and it duly came to pass as both Leclerc and Hamilton challenged Norris into the first corner, joined at a slightly later juncture by Verstappen. It was a classically Max exploitation of F1's racing guidelines. As they bore down on the corner four-wide, Verstappen had to put two wheels on the kerb, but he had joined the group with such velocity that it's unlikely he would have made the corner even if he'd had four wheels on asphalt. Over the grass he went, short-cutting Turn 2 and rejoining at Turn 3 in third place behind Norris and Leclerc – who had taken the lead by running off, but not quite to the same egregious extent.

Leclerc quickly handed the lead back, and Hamilton relieved Verstappen of third at the exit of Turn 5, obviating any intervention from the stewards. From there Norris pulled away into an unsurmountable lead, leaving the arm-wrestling to those behind.

At the start of lap six Verstappen launched up the inside of Hamilton into Turn 1, banging wheels, then went a-mowing again when Hamilton got his nose ahead on the inside line for Turn 2. Having rejoined, he made a pass stick into Turn 4, but both were too late on the brakes: Hamilton's momentum took him off-track, while Verstappen lost momentum, and Russell had to check up to avoid a collision, enabling Ollie Bearman to scurry through in the Haas.

Hamilton rejoined ahead of Verstappen and was later penalised for leaving the track and gaining an advantage – leaving him to wonder why Max, at least, had not been subjected to the

same level of scrutiny for his various excursions.

Alone among the frontrunners, Verstappen had started on medium tyres and was able to complete an extended first stint that put him back on track in third place between Leclerc and Bearman. Russell had also fallen behind team-mate Andrea Kimi Antonelli while taking evasive action on lap six, but felt he had more pace than his team-mate after the stops, though Mercedes dithered for 10 laps before acceding to his lobbying for a swap so he could try to attack Bearman. By then it was too late and Piastri, now on a two-stop strategy, was closing in and would ultimately pass both Mercedes.

A late Virtual Safety Car period to cover Sainz's Williams then saved Leclerc a late assault from Verstappen, and Bearman a similar encounter with Piastri. Norris put his dominant victory down to a change of approach after the Singapore Grand Prix.

"I feel better with the car today," he said. "Everything's about how I feel with the car. Last year, I felt very good with the car, I could perform better. This year I've struggled to get to grips with it. It's been incredibly quick, but it's clearly still difficult to drive. But when you get in that sweet spot, you can make it work, and it's still something that over the last few weekends I've struggled with, even in Singapore [where he finished third after qualifying fifth].

"We had our debrief and I was like, 'Guys, this is exactly the car I don't want. This is the reason why we can't win more races, why we're not gonna win in the future, is if we keep having a car that doesn't give me what I need.' This weekend, I just had a little bit more of what I need, and I can perform how I did. It's as simple as that."

STUART CODLING



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RESULTS ROUND 20/24

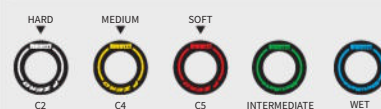
AUTODROMO HERMANOS RODRIGUEZ
26.10.25 / 71 LAPS



POS	DRIVER	TIME	GRID
1	Lando Norris McLaren-Mercedes MCL39	1h37m58.574s	1
2	Charles Leclerc Ferrari SF-25	+30.324s	2
3	Max Verstappen Red Bull-Honda RBPT RB21	+31.049s	5
4	Ollie Bearman Haas-Ferrari VF-25	+40.955s	9
5	Oscar Piastri McLaren-Mercedes MCL39	+42.065s	7
6	Andrea Kimi Antonelli Mercedes F1 W16	+47.837s	6
7	George Russell Mercedes F1 W16	+50.287s	4
8	Lewis Hamilton Ferrari SF-25	+56.446s	3
9	Esteban Ocon Haas-Ferrari VF-25	+1m15.464s	11
10	Gabriel Bortoleto Sauber-Ferrari C45	+1m16.863s	16
11	Yuki Tsunoda Red Bull-Honda RBPT RB21	+1m19.048s	10
12	Alexander Albon Williams-Mercedes FW47	-1 lap/+2.450s	17
13	Isack Hadjar Racing Bulls-Honda RBPT VCARB 02	-1 lap/+6.566s	8
14	Lance Stroll Aston Martin-Mercedes AMR25	-1 lap/+7.035s	19
15	Pierre Gasly Alpine-Renault A525	-1 lap/+44.080s	18
16	Franco Colapinto Alpine-Renault A525	-1 lap/+44.376s	20
17	Carlos Sainz Williams-Mercedes FW47	67 laps/accident	12
R	Fernando Alonso Aston Martin-Mercedes AMR25	34 laps/brakes	14
R	Nico Hulkenberg Sauber-Ferrari C45	25 laps/power unit	13
R	Liam Lawson Racing Bulls-Honda RBPT VCARB 02	5 laps/accident damage	15

FASTEST LAP Russell 1m20.052s (120.268mph)

TYRE COMPOUNDS USED



DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP

1 Norris 357; 2 Piastri 356; 3 Verstappen 321; 4 Russell 258; 5 Leclerc 210; 6 Hamilton 146; 7 Antonelli 97; 8 Albon 73; 9 Hulkenberg 41; 10 Hadjar 39; 11 Sainz 38; 12 Alonso 37; 13 Bearman 32; 14 Stroll 32; 15 Lawson 30; 16 Ocon 30; 17 Tsunoda 28; 18 Gasly 20; 19 Bortoleto 19; 20 Colapinto 0; 21 Doohan 0.

CONSTRUCTORS' CHAMPIONSHIP

1 McLaren 713; 2 Ferrari 356; 3 Mercedes 355; 4 Red Bull 346; 5 Williams 111; 6 Racing Bulls 72; 7 Aston Martin 69; 8 Haas 62; 9 Sauber 60; 10 Alpine 20.



FORMULA 1

Massa in court with £64m claim

Felipe Massa was awaiting the outcome of a pre-trial hearing in the UK's Royal Courts of Justice as we went to press, to determine whether his £64million legal claim against the FIA, Formula One Management (FOM) and Bernie Ecclestone can continue. Massa's legal counsel has asserted that Formula 1's leadership was involved in the "deliberate concealment" of Nelson Piquet Jr's 2008 Singapore Grand Prix crash, which Massa argues cost him that year's world title.

His case hinges on a 2023 interview with ex-F1 supremo Ecclestone, who had apparently suggested that he and former FIA president Max Mosley knew enough about the crash plot to expunge the race from the official standings, but chose to avoid drawing attention to a scandal.

Ecclestone contends that he does not remember giving the interview, a defence mounted by his lawyer David Quest KC. Massa finished 13th in that race, after leaving a pitstop with a fuel hose stuck to his Ferrari.

In the grand prix, Piquet was instructed to crash on the 14th lap and trigger a safety car after Renault team-mate Fernando Alonso had made a pitstop, ensuring that Alonso could take victory. Massa's title rival Lewis Hamilton finished in third; at that year's Brazilian GP finale, he beat Massa to the title by one point.

Nick De Marco KC, Massa's lawyer, stated that those in charge of F1 at the time were involved in "deliberate concealment" of the Singapore crash to protect their own interests, and that the parties had "deliberately conspir[ed]

together to cover up one of the most serious scandals in the history of sport".

Quest had countered that "Mr Massa's poor performance in the race was not related to the crash, and neither was Lewis Hamilton's strong performance. Neither of them were aware of Renault's ploy." FOM counsellor Anneliese Day KC added in her statement, "The simple fact is that over the course of both the Singapore Grand Prix and across the 2008 season, Mr Hamilton outperformed Mr Massa [and everyone else]."

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE



Pitlane snafu did for Massa's hopes in 2008 Singapore GP

PORZYCKI/NURPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES



FORMULA 1

Colapinto looks safer for 2026

Franco Colapinto is likely to continue with Alpine in 2026, with his improving performances and support from his native Argentina looking sufficient to secure the drive. After a difficult opening period with Alpine, when he was thrown into the line-up six races into the season in place of Jack Doohan, Colapinto has picked up the pace.

At recent events, the 22-year-old has begun to match experienced team-mate Pierre Gasly more often over a qualifying lap. Alpine used the opening practice session at the Mexican Grand Prix to run reserve Paul Aron in Gasly's place, giving it a chance to assess both drivers simultaneously, and Colapinto had a half-second advantage in the final timing charts over the Estonian. Aron has reportedly impressed in Alpine's Testing of Previous Cars programme, and was touted as the Renault-owned team's sole alternative for 2026.

Although Doohan had made waves in an attempt to reclaim his drive, including raising sponsorship money, Alpine felt it was more beneficial to retain Colapinto for the rest of this season. Doohan therefore may well leave the team to seek potential reserve roles elsewhere in the paddock.

TEE/LAT/GETTY IMAGES



Mayer: "illusion of democracy"

Villars: plans to sue FIA

FIA

Sulayem: no contest

Mohammed Ben Sulayem is set to be unopposed in his candidacy for a second term as FIA president after Tim Mayer pulled out of the running. Mayer's challenge, and that of another contender – Franco-Swiss Laura Villars – became unviable because all candidates must submit a prospective list of vice-presidents from all six of the FIA's global regions.

The World Council list, however, has just one from South America: Brazil's Fabiana

Ecclestone, the wife of Bernie who had already confirmed her support for Ben Sulayem.

Ben Sulayem is therefore set to enter his second term as president after being elected in 2021, with the rule preventing anybody else from running. Mayer labelled the process as undemocratic as he faced the press ahead of the United States Grand Prix to officially declare the end of his campaign

"There will only be one candidate, the incumbent," said the 59-year-old American. "That's not democracy. That's the illusion of democracy. Throughout our FIA Forward campaign, we've spoken of fairness, reform and integrity, of returning the FIA to its members.

But the outcome of this election, and the flawed process that governs it, proves how far we've drifted from that ideal."

The FIA responded, stating: "The FIA presidential election is a structured and democratic process, to ensure fairness and integrity at every stage. The requirements related to the regional representation of the vice-presidents for sport, and to select them from the World Motor Sport Council in order to draw up a presidential list, are not new. These criteria applied to previous elections."

Villars will sue the FIA over its democratic standards in the French courts under a *référé* procedure, requesting that the court demand the postponement of the FIA's presidential election until a final ruling is made regarding the dispute. As Autosport went to press, this was scheduled for 10 November.

"I have twice tried to open a constructive dialogue with the FIA on essential matters such as internal democracy and the transparency of electoral rules," said Villars. "I am not acting against the FIA. I am acting to protect it. Democracy is not a threat to the FIA; it is its strength."

ED HARDY & BEN VINEL

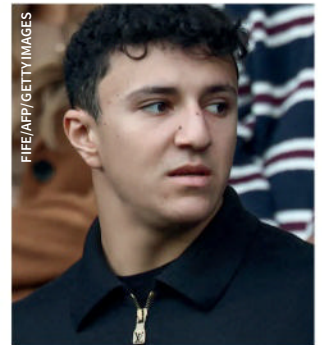


Sulayem: set to be unopposed



MALONE TO STEP DOWN AT LIBERTY

John Malone is to step down as chairman of Liberty Media and Liberty Global, the company that owns both Formula 1 and MotoGP, to be replaced by Robert R 'Dob' Bennett at the start of next year. Cable TV entrepreneur Malone will be installed as chairman emeritus when Bennett takes over as chairman, having led Liberty Media's expansion into the ownership of various motorsports properties over the past decade.

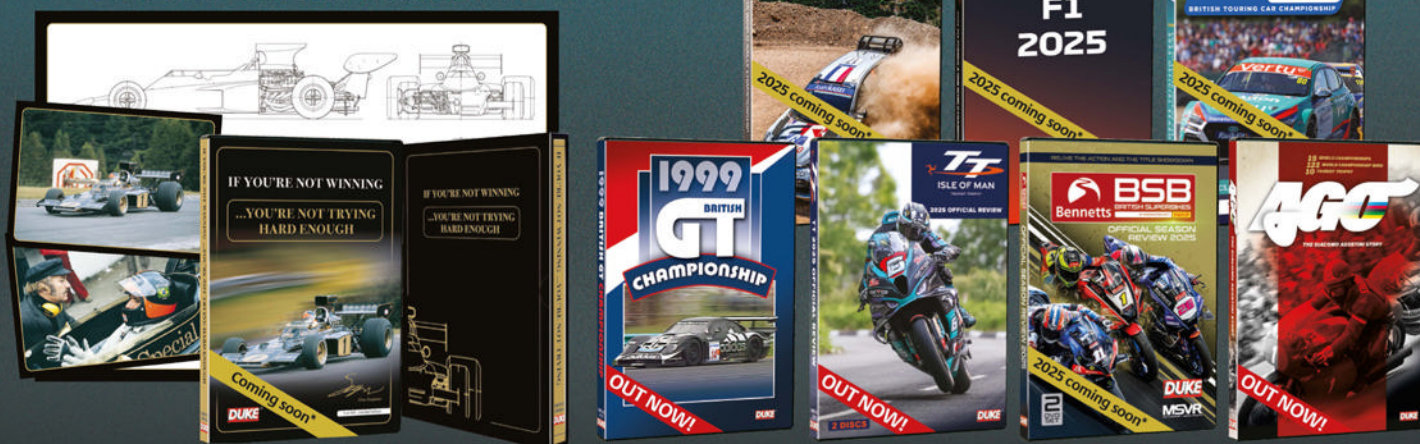


RED BULL DOOR STILL AJAR FOR HADJAR

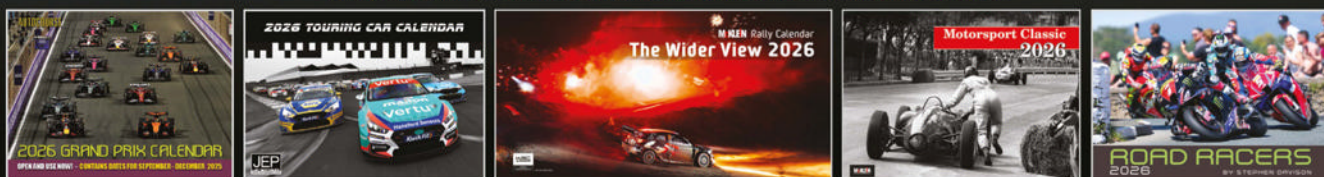
Isack Hadjar has played down suggestions that he has been told he will move to Red Bull for the 2026 F1 campaign, with the team postponing any decision on its driving line-up for next season to the end of this year. The Franco-Algerian is widely tipped for a step up to the lead Red Bull team after an impressive debut year, with Formula 2 ace Arvid Lindblad linked to a Racing Bulls drive.

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INSIDER

Jake Boxall-Legge assesses the teams versus the cost cap

After a small delay to the expected communique from the FIA, Formula 1's 2024 cost cap results are in. And, once more, nobody has surpassed the limit, set at a base of \$135million (plus extra for inflation and calendar size), meaning that there have been no major breaches for the past three years. Aston Martin's procedural breach was just that – its auditor was unable to provide their final signature on its submission prior to the deadline; the FIA accepted this as force majeure, and Aston Martin has accepted any further ramifications.

Four years in, teams have become accustomed to dealing with the cost cap. Ultimately, it's just another ruleset; just as engineers expend their time on developing an all-encompassing understanding of the FIA's technical regulations, finance teams tackle the cost cap rules with a similar degree of fastidiousness. It's the accounting world championship, and falling barely on the wrong side of the cap can levy very real consequences on a team as a whole.

There were rumours that another team had transgressed the cost cap regulations, as the later timing of the FIA's cost cap recap (late October, rather than early September) had apparently hinted at a breach somewhere else along the grid. But this was proven to be false; all 10 teams involved in 2024 had complied, and that was the end of that.

Red Bull, of course, had to come to terms with that when its finances in the first year of the cap strayed beyond the then \$145million cost cap (£118million) by £1.8m. The team was hit with a \$7m fine (helpfully, not one of the outlets covered by the cap) and a 10% reduction in aerodynamic testing. Since Red Bull was already on the lowest allocation, having been in the lead of the 2022 championship at that point, the 70% modifier applied to the base aero testing limits was thus reduced to 63%. "It gives an advantage to our competitors, which is why they were pushing so hard for a draconian penalty," former

team boss Christian Horner rued at the time. "I'm sure if you burned our wind tunnel down, it wouldn't be enough."

The FIA revealed that Red Bull had incorrectly adjusted or excluded costs of around £5.6m, leading to the overspend. This included catering costs, allocating costs of spare parts to the team's heritage department, and other minor indiscretions involving employee-based overheads.

For all of Horner's complaints, it didn't hurt the team much in 2023; Red Bull and Max Verstappen tore through the titles, akin to lions through a herd of grazing impalas. There's an argument to make that it did, however, assist with a slight downturn in form over 2024 as the final months of the cost cap penalty would have impinged upon the RB20's development. Yet, engineers are very good at cutting their cloth accordingly; creativity and ingenuity can often thrive amid tightening restrictions.

Penalties for procedural breaches are usually financial. Williams copped a \$25,000 fine for submitting its 2021 accounts late, although Aston Martin will not take a fine due to the nature of the breach. In 2023, Honda and Renault also took an accepted breach agreement (ABA) after indiscretions in their filings, and were fined \$600,000 and \$400,000 respectively.

Those in charge of the oversize calculators will have to get their heads around the myriad revisions for next year's revised cost cap. While the limit rises to \$215m next year, it includes more costs that had been previously allowed an exemption. Marketing, heritage and human resources costs will remain outside of the cap, as will the fees of drivers and the three highest-paid personnel. Furthermore, Sauber (or Audi, from next year) will receive an offset in line with the higher living costs in Switzerland for its staff based at Hinwil – although this was an unpopular addition among the other teams.

While a new series of cost cap rules might open the doors

"Engineers are good at cutting their cloth; ingenuity can often thrive amid tighter restrictions"

once more to a first overspend breach since Red Bull's 2021 miscalculation, we won't truly know until 2027; next year's accounting update will correspond with this season's spending. It would be surprising to see a team fall foul of the current rules, given the effort and time expended on ensuring that every part of a team complies with the rules.

The FIA seems to be pretty hot on creative accounting, as demonstrated by Red Bull's earlier attempt to append some of its assets to a cap-exempt department. Even employee bonus costs are regulated to ensure teams don't cut wages and convert them into exemption territory. Thankfully, F1 is spared the nonsense of transfer-fee amortisation, such as the Premier League's profit and sustainability rules. The threat of losing performance should be enough in a discipline governed by the stopwatch. ✎



Massa was dignity personified saluting fans on Interlagos podium

FERRARI/LAT/GETTY IMAGES



INSIDER

Massa is doing what he feels is right and that's OK, argues Oleg Karpov

Felipe Massa's campaign to somehow still win the 2008 Formula 1 world title has long become a source of amusement (*and bemusement – ed*) for many. Seeking justice for something that happened more than 15 years ago sounds a bit ridiculous to some. "Just forget about it and move on," they say. "He's doing it for the money," others claim – "out of greed."

Some even argue that Massa should rather sue Ferrari for releasing him from that Singapore Grand Prix pitstop with the fuel hose still attached to the car, which meant he scored no points that evening. Had that not happened, he'd probably have finished on the podium in that Marina Bay event – the race that now sits at the heart of his legal battle with F1, the FIA and Bernie Ecclestone.

But what's really so wrong about trying to fight for what you believe is right? Remember, he could have scored six points and only lost the title by one.

I doubt Massa that truly dreams of some sort of ceremony at Interlagos before the start of the race, with him finally handed the championship trophy he narrowly missed. He probably knows that's not going to happen. The most realistic outcome, though even that remains uncertain, would be financial compensation. But even that could bring something more valuable: closure.

After all, try looking at it from his perspective. That 2008 season was Massa's one real shot at the world title and was arguably his finest season in F1. Whatever your take on his current actions, 'Crashgate' undeniably affected the outcome of that battle. It remains one of the darkest, ugliest chapters in motorsport history.

Is it really so outrageous for Felipe to still be angry about it? Or to feel uneasy knowing that those in power were aware of the truth before the final race of the season in Brazil, which he so brilliantly won? How is someone supposed to feel when the key players escaped any real

punishment – and you're left as the only true loser of it all?

When your lifetime dream slips away because of something like that, you've every right to feel furious. So what's so strange about wanting, at least, to set the record straight? Sure, a decade and a half has passed. For most F1 fans, that's far too long to still care. We remember 2008 for one of the most dramatic finales in F1 history. We enjoy the 'Is that Glock?' jokes. And we treat the Singapore GP as a great story to tell over a beer with casual fans.

For Massa, though, it was possibly the defining moment of his F1 career. Nobody can say for sure how the championship would have played out had Nelsinho Piquet not 'assisted' Renault team-mate Fernando Alonso to victory that night in Singapore – but it's impossible to deny the race's impact on the title fight.

There shouldn't be an expiry date for correcting a wrong in sport. Time passed wasn't an argument when Lance Armstrong was stripped of his Tour de France titles. It left a sour taste, yes, but it wasn't wrong to act.

The Massa case, of course, isn't that simple. Lewis Hamilton won his first world title fair and square on

"How is someone supposed to feel when the key players escaped any real punishment?"

track. He's a deserving champion, and it would be wrong to take that away. This is no doping scandal – it's far more complex, involving multiple parties and perhaps details we still don't know. There are unanswered questions, too. And it's actually puzzling why it's only Massa still trying to get them answered.

It's an uncomfortable story and one that certainly doesn't help F1's image. But if someone who feels robbed wants to seek justice, that shouldn't be something to mock. And when no one else is willing to help, there's only one place left to go – court.

That's what it's there for. And there's absolutely nothing wrong with that. ✎



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INSIDER

Pat Symonds on the possibilities of hydrogen in Formula 1

A question I am repeatedly asked is whether hydrogen could be a suitable fuel for Formula 1. At Le Mans there are several projects aimed at using hydrogen so it cannot be ruled out but, in my opinion, it is not a logical option.

Hydrogen, although abundant, does not naturally occur in its raw state. Processing compounds to split out the hydrogen requires energy and therefore, like synthetic gasoline, hydrogen is actually an energy carrier rather than a raw fuel. The most sustainable method of producing hydrogen is to pass electricity through water to break it down into hydrogen and oxygen in a device called an electrolyser. This requires less energy than is needed to make synthetic fuel and, if electricity from renewable sources is used, is extremely sustainable.

As an energy carrier, hydrogen is very good, with an energy density nearly four times that of gasoline. But for automotive use we need to consider the complete system used to turn the stored energy into power at the wheels. It is here that hydrogen looks less attractive.

For a vehicle, you have to assess the efficiency of the energy conversion from stored energy and also the systems required to store and deliver the energy. With a regular gasoline-type fuel, we are able, in an F1 engine, to convert this at over 50% efficiency. This means that of the 42 or so megajoules of stored energy that the fuel contains in each kilogram, we can use about half of it to drive the vehicle, with the other half wasted, mainly as heat. The system we need to contain and deliver the fuel is relatively simple, with the fuel contained in a ballistic tank together with a few pumps and pipes to take it from the tank to the combustion chamber. To start a race, we have around 100 to 110kg of fuel and the supporting systems probably add another 10kg. The stored energy in the fuel is around 4.4 gigajoules, with again about 2.2 gigajoules driving the car.

We can use hydrogen in two ways. The first is a fuel cell

and the second is to use it in much the same way as gasoline in an internal combustion engine. The fuel cell is a device that is essentially the reverse of the electrolyser that made the hydrogen. It works by mixing atmospheric oxygen with the hydrogen to produce electricity, the only by-product being water. This can be a relatively efficient process, with thermal efficiency similar to that of a current F1 engine. The true efficiency is very dependent on the load on the system and the temperature.

Unfortunately, the waste heat is somewhat difficult to deal with as there is no exhaust which, in a conventional engine, gets rid of a large part of the excess heat. In a fuel cell vehicle this has to be done with a cooling system that requires very large radiators. In terms of 'engine' weight, the mass of the fuel cell must be added to an electric motor, the cooling system itself and a battery that is needed to give the throttle response the driver demands.

When using hydrogen in an internal combustion engine, we need to carry a relatively heavy engine but a smaller cooling system and no battery. The engine is not dissimilar to a petrol engine and could theoretically operate at a similar efficiency and therefore have a similar mass to a conventional engine.

The real problem comes from storing the hydrogen. There are two ways of doing this. The first is as a gas under pressure and the second is as an extremely cold liquid. If we assume that, whether used in a fuel cell or an internal combustion engine, we are looking at similar efficiency, then just like the conventional engine we will need to store around 4.4 gigajoules of energy at the start of the race. To do this at the given efficiency would require around 36kg of gas. If we compress this to 700bar, which is the maximum used today, we will require a 928-litre tank. As a conventional cylindrical pressure vessel this would be around 700mm diameter and 2.4 metres long. That's

"It is likely refuelling would be required – not an easy thing to do with a cryogenic liquid"

difficult to fit in a car and, due to the strength required to handle the pressure, immensely heavy, probably around 500kg even using F1-type materials.

Alternatively, hydrogen can be stored in liquid form at cryogenic temperatures. The boiling point of hydrogen is -252.9C. This makes handling liquid hydrogen extremely complex and hazardous. The 36kg of hydrogen required would occupy just over 500 litres as a liquid so it is likely refuelling would be required – not an easy thing to do with a cryogenic liquid. However the hydrogen is stored therefore, while the molecule is attractive, at a system level sustainable gasoline is hard to beat. ❄

**Want to ask Pat a tech question for a future issue?
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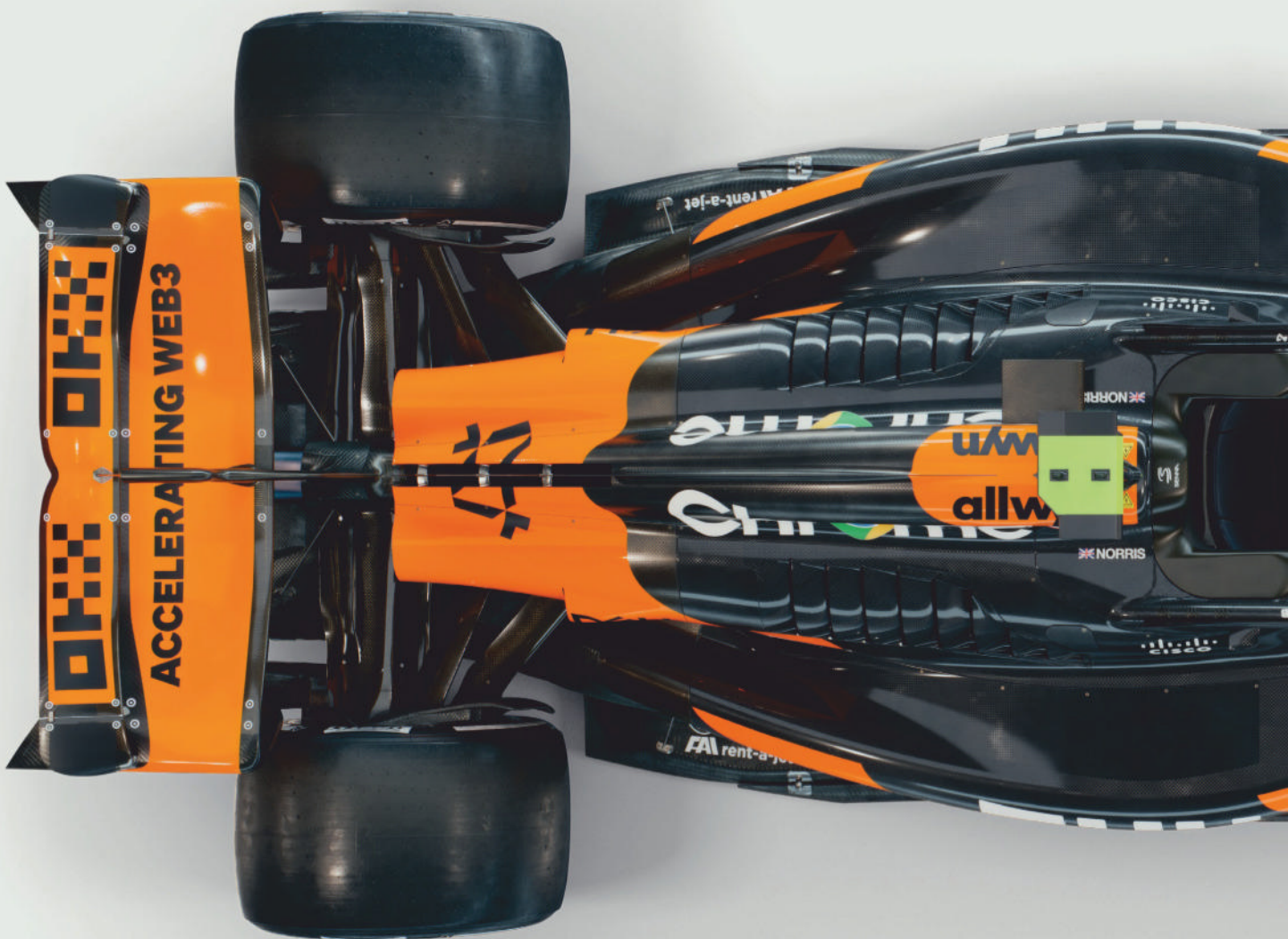


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HOW THE MCL39 BECAME MCLAREN'S NEXT GREAT F1 CAR

It's already secured the team's 13th constructors' crown and could do the double. Here's the story of McLaren's newest great

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE



MCL39

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Podiums	30
Poles	10
Fastest laps	11
Points	713

Up to and including 2025 Mexican GP
(excludes sprints, except for points)





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McLaren managed to move the game on significantly with the MCL39 during period of convergence

Forging a path to the top of any premier-level sporting discipline is an immensely perilous journey, one festooned with setbacks, self-doubt, and sacrifice. Staying there? That's an arguably greater challenge, one that requires a subtly different skillset.

McLaren made the precipitous climb from the back of the field to the summit of Formula 1 through 2023 and 2024, and was ultimately rewarded with its surge to a first constructors' crown in 26 years. This rise has been underpinned by its not-insignificant reshuffle of staff, as Andrea Stella sought to put his own stamp on the squad after taking over as team principal. While Stella sought to course-correct the team's fortunes, the troubled MCL60 of 2023 was transformed into a frequent podium finisher. Subsequently, the MCL38 of 2024 racked up wins through the year and ultimately contributed to that title success in the teams' championship.

To continue weaving further success into McLaren's lengthy tapestry, the MCL39 had to move the game on significantly. The stagnant regulations and ongoing convergence throughout the field made this an ambitious aim. The field had compressed across the course of 2024; hundredths, not tenths, decided positions. To circumvent the variance, Woking's engineers wanted to chase the holy grail of car design: build a machine that could reduce the effect of F1's myriad variables through a surplus of superior performance.

For the most part, McLaren has done so, leading to its smothering of the constructors' championship – wrapped up in a pretty bow with six rounds still left to go. Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri continue to spar for supremacy in the drivers' championship, accosted by Red Bull's four-time title winner Max Verstappen.

While the might of the MCL39 has dwindled towards the end of the season, not helped by the early wrap-up of its development cycle, that shouldn't take the shine off the car's quality throughout the 2025 season, especially in the nascent stages of the season. It's also had its quirks, some of which have proven to be a source of occasional fury for both drivers – but once the car enters 'the window', it's been dynamite. But what makes this papaya projectile tick?

WILLINGNESS TO INNOVATE – EVEN WITH 2026 ON THE HORIZON

With F1's all-new 2026 regulations looming larger on the agenda, teams were ultimately more likely to prioritise evolution over revolution for this season. Rather than exhaust resources on getting a brand-new car concept bedded in, opting for a continuation of a proven model generally requires less developmental attention.

That doesn't mean a team can't innovate within the existing framework, something that McLaren has proven with its MCL39. While McLaren had been hard at work refreshing contracts for its key staff, including head of aerodynamics Peter Prodromou, the MCL39 was the first car to have chief designer Rob Marshall involved from the outset. Marshall's design team had been tasked with the car layout for 2025 – and, beyond, for 2026 – to get more out ➤



SECRETS OF THE MCL39

Struggles of the 2023 season were eased as the MCL60 was turned into a frequent podium finisher

MCL39's primacy made clear by McLaren tying up this season's constructors' title with six rounds to go





HONE/LAT/GETTY IMAGES

Challenge to Red Bull was stepped up again in 2024, resulting in six GP victories and the constructors' crown

McLaren's 1-2 result in March's Chinese Grand Prix symptomatic of its early 2025 domination



MSUTTON/FORMULA 1/GETTY IMAGES



Stella noted one of the MCL39's flaws was a front-end 'numbness' reported by both drivers

of the McLaren package. So, while many of the visual cues were familiar when compared to last year's car, there were some key points of interest to observe when scratching under the surface.

For one, the overhauled front suspension demonstrated the lengths that the team would go to, particularly in its aim of creating more consistent downforce from the car's underbody. The upper wishbone had its rear leg positioned further down, hinting at a more extreme approach to generating an anti-dive effect to keep the floor at a consistent level throughout a lap of any given circuit.

At the rear, McLaren also spent much of its development time enhancing the flow-field conditions within the braking system and around the tyres. Over 2024, McLaren had found a growing niche in building tyre deltas through race stints, an effect that snowballed into situations where the two drivers often burst into life later into the races. If it could continue to do that organically, it had a mechanism that could ensure tyres would not overheat at the end of a qualifying lap and could mitigate thermal degradation during a race.

There was another aspect to the MCL39 that perhaps was not as well-documented until later into the season, oddly characterised by the point of greatest plank wear. Most teams had started to experiment with adding anti-lift characteristics into their rear suspension, with the aim of stopping the rear end from bouncing quite as much under load and over bumps.

Most teams experience their greatest level of plank wear at the rear, which has largely restricted how low the diffuser area can be situated towards the ground. With an anti-lift format at the rear this can be kept relatively static, but McLaren has found even more success here by running its suspension in a manner where the plank wear shifts forwards, allowing it to keep the rear end much lower to the ground, and increasing the effectiveness of the diffuser.

It's said that, since F1 cars have very little spring travel (or torsional resistance) left to play with at high downforce, it all lies in the flex of the suspension members themselves. Evidently, McLaren had been able to give itself a bit more leeway at the front to allow the plank to drop first, while simultaneously mitigating front-end dive under braking.

EARLY SEASON SUCCESS – BUT 'NUMB' FRONT END CREATES DIFFICULTIES

Interestingly, the early main concern about the MCL39 pertained to the rear end, not the front. While it had emerged in testing that McLaren was very strong over a race distance, the drivers had found it a little bit livelier than expected when hustling the car around for a qualifying lap. "I think if we want to improve anything at the minute, it's still the rear of the car," Norris said during the pre-season test in Bahrain. "The more you can improve the rear, the more everything just gets better. But the rest of it feels correct and it feels like it's in the same ballpark [as last year]. That's what we want. I don't think we're expecting to be a big step ahead of anyone."

In his exclusive interview with Autosport (October 2025 issue), Piastri concurred with Norris's earlier comments about the launch-spec McLaren: "The car was very tricky to drive >>

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McLaren suspension shifts plank wear forwards, allowing the rear to be run closer to the ground

on the limit in testing. And, you know, our race runs were always very strong, but in the kind of qualifying sims we were genuinely struggling. We had a lot of work to do to try and unlock that.”

Qualifying performance has been spottier compared to McLaren’s prowess in race trim, although both drivers have been capable of turning multiple pole-winning laps out of the MCL39. It’s just a little bit more difficult to do, and that’s demonstrated in the way that the car likes to be driven. Both Norris and Piastri concurred that it was not worlds away from how the 2024 car operated but, when at the front of the field, those characteristics are somewhat heightened. Once the team had got the rear to settle down after testing, the point of difference between the two drivers shifted to the front end.

At the start of the year, Piastri found the turn-in of the car relatively agreeable, while Norris stated that the car “does not suit the way I want to drive in an attacking way. It doesn’t suit me in terms of me wanting to push the entries and push the braking.” That’s evident when looking at available GPS data, where the two McLaren drivers tend to brake sooner for corners, let the front end bite, and then hit the throttle earlier out of the corners. While early turn-in speed is sacrificed, the corner exits can be exploited a little bit more.

Those characteristics can go some way towards explaining the difference between the two drivers in the early season. Piastri thrived and motored off into the championship lead, while Norris found the car much more difficult to contend with over a single lap once he’d stepped up to the oche in qualifying. In race trim, those characteristics were more muted, but the race permutations during 2025 have largely hinged on qualifying performance.

That’s not to say Piastri didn’t find it occasionally tricky to work with; Stella noted that both drivers felt that the front end could be “numb” in offering driver feedback, making it difficult to respond to the car in real time. Stella explained the phenomenon during the Miami Grand Prix weekend, when reflecting on how Piastri missed out on pole versus Verstappen. “We can produce really good corners, but it’s difficult to be repeatable for our drivers,” he offered. “Oscar made a comment. He said after his Q2 lap, ‘Turn 1 was so good, but I’m not sure I’m going to be able to repeat, because I’m not sure exactly how I made it – the car didn’t give me a great feeling as to how this was happening.’ It’s a car that doesn’t give you much cueing, which is the technical word we use. And this means that it’s not easy for our drivers to repeat some big performances that we can see in individual laps.”

When Norris seemed at sea with the car, McLaren took some of the feedback and implemented a revised front suspension package for June’s Canadian Grand Prix. This was optional for the two drivers and did not yield any immediate performance changes, but the idea behind it was to enhance the more visceral cues for the driver. It was a small geometrical change to the overall caster angle, which in turn produces a change in kingpin inclination (the angle between upper and lower suspension joints, but viewed front-on).

This induces more self-aligning torque associated with the wheels while the driver steers, something that offers greater feedback. It wasn’t quite a panacea for the MCL39’s weak points, but it at least gave Norris more confidence with the car; Piastri, meanwhile, felt he didn’t need it. >>



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New front wing tried out in Canadian GP practice, then assessed in detail, and raced in Austria

BALANCE AND COUNTER-BALANCE

As in 2024, McLaren produced a series of beam wing options throughout the early season to give it more choices when balancing the car out. One of the tricks that F1 engineers have picked up has been in reworking the front wing elements to draw more performance out of the underbody, which in turn has required the teams to implement more options at the rear to balance out the downforce levels.

McLaren has tended to operate with a split beam-wing design, with a lower single element used to mount the wing to the gearbox, and the second wing elements mounted higher up and sculpted around the exhaust. These upper elements tend to be situated at a lower angle of attack, yielding a small amount of downforce while helping to link the low-pressure flow fields behind the car to keep the floor working effectively.

Along with the front suspension modifications for the Canadian GP, McLaren also introduced a revised front wing with more furniture situated on the element-to-endplate mountings. This was one of the developments that got McLaren's typically studious treatment: trialled in Montreal practice, left unraced, and then dissected in the analysis before being implemented properly for the Austrian GP weekend next time out.

The team also made additions to its floor throughout the first half of the season to remain competitive; Norris had warned early in the year that McLaren still could not afford to take its foot off the gas too soon. But, with 2026 requiring plenty of lead-up time, it was only a matter of time before McLaren diverted its resources away from the MCL39.

Should McLaren fail to secure a first drivers' title for either Norris or Piastri, it could be accused of closing out development on the MCL39 too soon, though it's fair to say that the odd driver error and occasional sub-optimal strategy has cost the car wins. Red Bull, in its determination to understand why its RB21 had initially proved so inconsistent, continued to apply updates to the car after the summer break. The gains in performance that the team has uncovered suggest that it was right to do so, and the rebirth of Verstappen's title defence has started to put both McLaren drivers under scrutiny.

Stella believes that, even if McLaren had continued to develop the car for a few more weeks, it would only find the most marginal of gains. His assertion was that McLaren had entered the season with a car that was "already quite mature", and that even the mid-season updates had not offered any dramatic improvements – according to his comments, the car had reached a plateau. He also added that, since the aerodynamic testing regulations hurt the championship-winning team the most, it's much more difficult to straddle two seasons and balance the resources for each.

"It takes weeks for us to add one point of aerodynamic efficiency because we were at a plateau in our aerodynamic development," Stella explained over the Mexican GP weekend. "In the 2026 car, every week we add a lot of downforce. So that's where, with the best information you have available, you have to make a call.

"We also don't have to forget that by being the champions, we are the most restricted by »



The MCL39 is the first McLaren to have chief designer Marshall involved from the inception

the regulations in terms of the wind tunnel and CFD allowance. It's not like we have an unlimited amount of resources that we can use. We need to be considerate in the way we allocate resources this year to next year, because it comes from the same pot when it comes to CFD and aerodynamic wind tunnel testing.

"It's not like if I spend three weeks more on the 2025, I'm going to add one tenth of lap time. We had plateaued. To produce the upgrades that we took to the middle of the season, it was a huge undertaking. We were like, 'Should we actually finalise?' We were struggling to improve what was already a pretty mature project. And you have seen how many cars actually attempted to develop and sometimes things were the opposite direction."

THE LEGACY OF THE MCL39

It's admittedly difficult to look objectively at the potential legacy of a car as a whole, at least while the season is still ongoing. Recent results have been contextualised by Red Bull's reinvigorated fortunes, and that team's dominance with its RB19 back in 2023 has perhaps skewed perceptions of what McLaren should have been able to achieve.

What is impressive, however, is how McLaren has been able to enjoy a semblance of consistency in a year where the field is much more compact. The overall supertimes – supertimes are based on the fastest single lap by each car at each race weekend, expressed as a percentage of the fastest single lap overall (100.000%) and averaged over the season – from the four seasons in this era correlate with that: the 2022 field was separated by 2.396% from the fastest car to the slowest; 2023 was lower at 1.584%; 2024 had a 1.698% difference; while 2025 currently stands at a 1.397% difference between the top and bottom teams on average after Mexico.

That Red Bull has managed to break into winning contention and put up a drivers' title contender is, in some ways, reminiscent of McLaren's season in 1998. That year, the MP4-13 was the class of the field, but the might of Ferrari and Michael Schumacher remained a pervasive thorn in its side throughout the duration of the season – up until the final round of the championship.

It's a similar story to 2007, where the McLaren MP4-22 was arguably a faster car than that year's Ferrari, but the repercussions of the spy scandal and two drivers taking points away from each other ensured that Ferrari won both titles.

Yet, history decrees that these were both great cars. The MCL39 should, in time, be as revered – and if one of its drivers can close out the drivers' title, it may command a higher pedestal in the pantheon of great F1 cars.

After all, it gathered an advantage over a once-dominant Red Bull in a relatively static ruleset, where progression has largely diminished throughout the field. The engineers behind that turnaround, led by Prodromou, Marshall, Neil Houldey and Mark Temple, are worthy of the plaudits. ❧



Clash between the McLarens at start of the US GP sprint race allowed Verstappen a clear run to victory

While Piastri was top dog at Zandvoort (pole, fastest lap, race victory), an oil leak for Norris put the mockers on a 1-2

MASON (GETTY IMAGES)

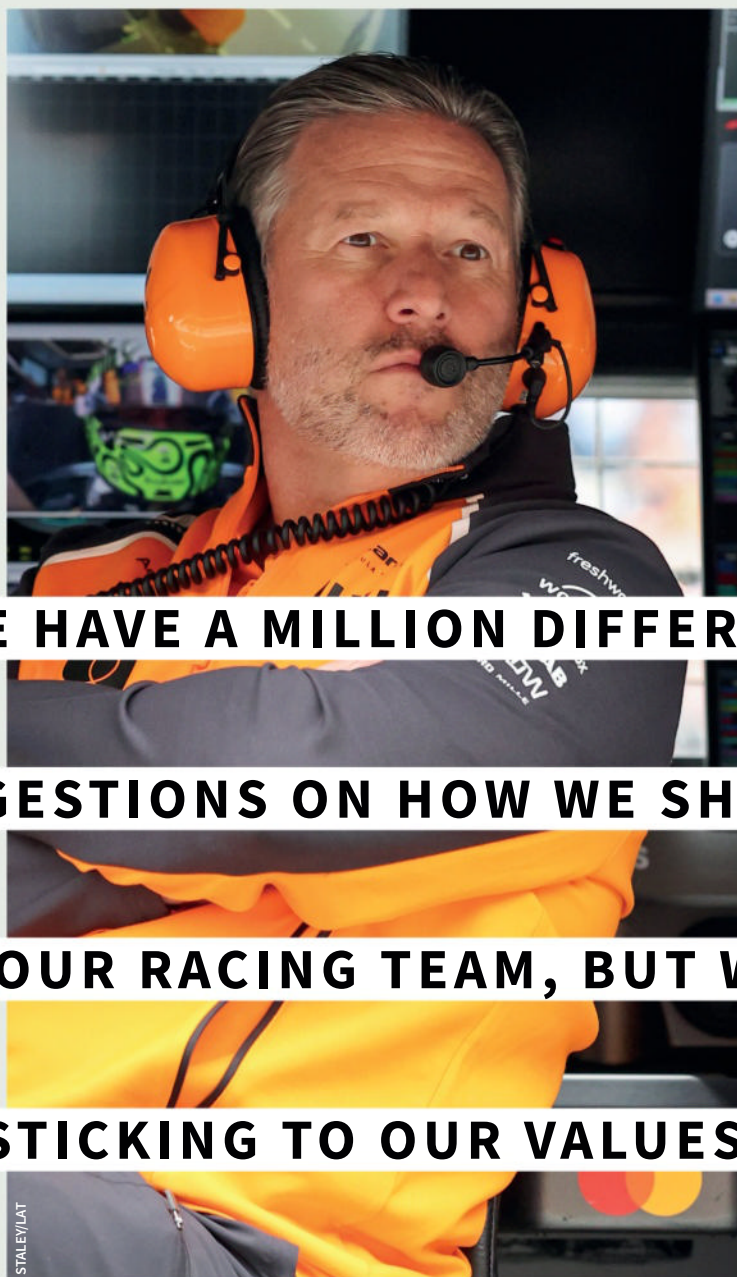




LILLMAN

MCLAREN RACING CEO

ZAK BROWN



**“WE HAVE A MILLION DIFFERENT
SUGGESTIONS ON HOW WE SHOULD
RUN OUR RACING TEAM, BUT WE’RE
STICKING TO OUR VALUES”**

STUART CODLING

PHOTOGRAPHY GETTY IMAGES

In 2016 McLaren was at a low competitive and commercial ebb, locked in a toxic cycle of mutual recrimination with its engine partner, Honda, and struggling to attract high-value sponsors – and retain existing ones. Behind-the-scenes boardroom intrigue would soon result in the ousting of Ron Dennis, whose drive and punctilious attention to detail had defined the team since the 1980s. Chief executive Jost Capito, a recent high-profile recruit from Volkswagen Motorsport, barely had time to warm his seat before he was out, too.

Zak Brown, a former racer, was Formula 1's pre-eminent sponsor-wrangler: his company Just Marketing International, which he later sold to Sebastian Coe's CSM, was responsible for landing some of the biggest deals in motor racing – from Martini's return to F1 as Williams title sponsor to the likes of Diageo and GlaxoSmithKline. On his watch McLaren has restructured and rebranded, re-adopting classic elements of its history including the papaya orange livery from the late-1960s and early-1970s, expanding its reach into IndyCar and sportscar racing – and returned to the winners' circle in F1.

It's now nine years since you joined McLaren – but how did that move come about? You were quite a left-field candidate – people were talking about you as being the next Bernie Ecclestone rather than running a team...

So I was headed to Formula One [Management, the commercial rights holder]. That was kind of my dream, if you like, because I'd been on the commercial side of the sport for 20 years, but I've always been a racer. But I think the F1 opportunity made a lot of sense and was kind of exactly my skill set.

At the same time, Ron Dennis was trying to recruit me to join McLaren. I was good friends with Ron, had done a lot of business with McLaren. But with all due respect to Ron, I've been my own boss for kind of my whole life.

And so the idea of being number two, even though that would have been the case at F1, but with a bit of a path to having the opportunity – no promises – to be the big boss... It was clear Chase [Carey] was brought in [to FOM] for a certain period of time, whereas with Ron, it was kind of like... maybe, maybe when I'm done – but by the way, I don't think I'm done anytime soon. So at the end of the day, I was gravitating towards F1.

But then I got a phone call one day from [McLaren shareholders] Shaikh Mohammed and Mansour Ojeh. They kind of said, 'We're going to make some changes. We know you've been talking to us. We'd love to come have you run the show.'

I was like, ah, now that gets me – that's a different opportunity. Because I was always a McLaren fan, always my favourite team, loved it, did all different sorts of racing. I was very close with McLaren because of my business. And I'm a racer at the end of the day. So I felt like McLaren could give me the personal enjoyment of not only being a deal maker and a brand builder, which is kind of what the F1 commercial role is, but what the F1 commercial role didn't have that McLaren had is when the lights went out, I'm in the race.

And coming back to being a racer, being drawn to the competitive side of, not running the show, but being in the show was very compelling to me. So that's ultimately how it all came about.

Whenever anyone joins a business in a senior role, it's a regime change. You do your due diligence and you work out what you want to do differently. So what was that process like? How much of a change of mindset did it require from you as well?

Quite a bit. I was used to having 1300-1400 people, leading a group that size – because when I sold to CSM and they put me in as group CEO, it was about 1400 people. So the size I was comfortable with, very comfortable with the commercial side of the business, but not with the technical side of the business.

And I've seen so many people over the years open their mouth and show their ignorance. I wanted to make sure I never said or did anything that made people think, 'This guy doesn't know what he's talking about'. So it took me a little bit of time.

I pretty quickly identified I needed a lot of leadership change. And there's no one here today on my leadership team that was on the leadership team when I joined. There are two people I promoted, but they weren't on the leadership team at the time. And that wasn't my design in the sense of I'm coming in, I'm going to change everything. It's quite the opposite. I want to come in and I want to understand everything. But then I quickly came to the conclusion I needed to change my leadership team. And not just people, but structure.

That was the first thing I did because I felt like I needed more people rowing in the same direction, more leadership, because that's really what the team lacked. You had boardroom tussles going on. Ron running it, [Martin] Whitmarsh is running it, Ron running it, Eric [Boullier] running it, [Jost] Capito running it for two weeks.

Forget about those individual people. Some of them very good, some of them not. But no business is going to be able to build momentum and provide direction when you have, I don't care who they are, five different bosses in five years, six years. I knew I needed to bring stability, but I also needed to rebuild trust. There was a lot of paranoia on the factory floor. It wasn't very transparent. Fans were grumpy, sponsorship was at a record low, terrible on-track results. And as I say, other than that, everything was great. What was great was our brand.

And I knew out of the people, so many had been here for so long, that there was greatness in there, but it hadn't been unlocked. So my approach was: let me bring the leadership to the table, let me get the economics going and get some belief behind our direction. Hence changing to the papaya, which was what our fans wanted. I started bringing in sponsors that would allow us to invest in wind tunnels, etc. And then it just started to build a lot of momentum.

Did it help that you were a fan of the team beforehand? Is there a particular era in the team's history that kind of appeals to you, inspires you?

For me, it would be the [Ayrton] Senna era, closely followed by the [Mika] Hakkinen era. Because even though I was deep into racing by the Hakkinen era, I wasn't in F1.

I love the history of McLaren. And I think it helped that I'm a racer, because a lot of the times you see people come in that don't have a racing background, and they're the ones that usually say or do something to show they don't know the sport. And I think that gave me a lot of credibility on the shop floor, that while some people maybe said, 'What does >>

Big-name hires aside, Brown's focus has been on unlocking the potential of staff already on the books

In 2016 McLaren was at a low point competitively and commercially as Honda partnership turned sour



GORIA/SUTTONIMAGES



ROSE/FORMULA1



McLaren's Senna era inspires Brown, although Dennis had to step aside when new broom swept in

SCHLEGELMILCH



There was no let-up in self-criticism and the drive for improvement in the debrief following the Spanish GP 1-2

S BLOKHAW/LAT



LENNON/FORMULA1

Employing two top-line drivers at liberty to race each other isn't an easy option, but Brown wouldn't have it any other way

IndyCar integral to McLaren broadening the scope of its racing activities, tapping into US market and fanbase



ALLIO/ICONSPORTSWIRE

he know about running an F1 team?', there wasn't a, 'What does this guy know about F1?'

You've made a conscious decision to broaden the scope of McLaren's racing programmes with IndyCar, the WEC programme. Is there an element of crossover and cooperation between those entities, as there was in the 1970s?

We're in the business of racing. That was one of the things that was exciting – Shaikh Mohammed and Mansour said, 'Hey, you can expand this into other forms of racing once you get F1 back on track'.

IndyCar gave us more North America, which is a huge part of our fanbase and one of, if not the most important market for most of our sponsors. So we wanted to have a competitive difference to our competitors in F1. And I'll give you some examples.

The World Endurance Championship is about getting closer to our automotive business. But when you put the three together... Arrow Electronics, our title sponsor in IndyCar, joined our F1 team. BAT [British American Tobacco], when they joined us, we were up against another F1 team, but we were able to say, 'We've got a bigger North American presence because 46% of the business is North America'. So the sponsor crossed over.

Then you get into talent, driver crossover. Pato O'Ward, our IndyCar driver, doing FPs. So there's some driver crossover. Personnel, you can't share resources because IndyCar and F1 are maximum effort. What you do have is people who have been on the F1 team a long time and don't want to travel to 24 races anymore, or always wanted to live in America. So we have had personnel move between the three series.

It gives us a storyline inside McLaren of these growth opportunities: north, south, east, west. Different racing platforms, different entry points for sponsors. So the fans love it. The sponsors love it. Our employees love it.

And it provides incremental opportunities for all of them. When you put that all together, that's why we have the racing portfolio we have.

One of the other interesting aspects of McLaren's recent success is that you've got there without doing too much shopping. You've hired in people such as Rob Marshall but mostly it's been promotion from within.

I think the magic we've created is unlocking the performance of the team that was clearly already sitting here. We brought in some other people because you want to have other perspectives. But I think at its core, we unlock the potential and the performance that was already sitting here.

So what are the main improvements left with the team and the drivers? Because you've already won the constructors' championship two years in a row. As we speak, it's highly likely one of your drivers will win the drivers' title. So what are those next opportunities? How hard are you looking for them?

We're looking very hard for them. Sometimes they slap you across the face but mostly they're really small, incremental opportunities. The minute you think you've perfected anything, you're going backwards.

You come out with this new component – you can make it lighter or more durable. So we have a mindset of we're

chasing perfection. We know we're never going to catch it, but that's not stopping us from chasing it. And we know that milliseconds count in this sport. So we're of the mindset of there's room for improvement everywhere. We're satisfied, but we're never complacent.

Andrea [Stella] would probably remember this from his time at Ferrari: Rob Smedley said that in 2004, when Ferrari had by far the fastest car on the grid, Jean Todt would make them hang their heads in shame if they did anything other than finish 1-2 at every race.

I don't believe in shaming people. We're a resilient group, but you learn.

We finished first and second in Spain this year and if you'd been sitting in our internal debrief you'd have thought we DNF'd – because we led with, 'Here are the 10 things we did wrong that we could have done better'. And it's all very positive intent, but that's the mindset of the team. Of course, we celebrate and that's an important reward, but you quickly move on and you get down to the next race.

Obviously you've got two top-line drivers, which is a choice, and you've allowed them to race each other – which is also a choice and a difficult one. The easy choice when you run an F1 team is to have a number one driver and a compliant number two. So what was the thinking behind setting out this 'let them race' policy, and what have been the moments where you thought, 'Actually this is a bit harder to manage than we expected'?

The 'papaya rules' kind of took on a life of their own, I think, because we said it over the radio once. It's just common sense. Don't run your team-mate off the track, certainly not with all four wheels. We don't want our cars touching.

It's a lot more simple than people think it is. We're racers. We've always let our drivers race. Senna-Prost, Lauda-Prost... Yes, it can end in tears, but we're determined for it not to end in tears. And so, while we have a million different suggestions on how we should run our racing team, we're sticking to our values.

We're going to stay true to our racing principles, if you'd like, which is we're racers and we're going to race each other hard, and we're going to make it to the end.

And our two drivers are going to shake hands and hopefully, hopefully we finish first and second. That's what we're pushing for and get in a situation where we let them decide who's first and who's second. And we're just being transparent, fair, honest, but we're not perfect.

So it does add stress. First of all, it makes it a lot easier to win the constructors' championship if you finish first and second. And if you have two number one drivers, you've got two chances of winning the drivers' championship, not just one.

I'm excited about these next races, not worried. And we know the consequences are, it could be like 2007, where we took points off each other, but we can put our head on the pillow saying, 'We raced, we gave both drivers an opportunity. And if someone beats us, they beat us.'

What we don't want to do is lose by beating ourselves. My aim is to keep both of these drivers with us for the long term – if one of them wins the championship, the other one won't, but I want them to know that they decided it for themselves out on track. And whatever happens, they come back next year ready to go again, knowing they'll get a fair crack of the whip. ✂



MP4/2

Years	1984-86
Races	48
Wins	22
1-2s	6
Poles	7
Fastest laps	7
Points	329.5 (9-6-4-3-2-1 scoring system)
Drivers' titles	3 (Niki Lauda 1984, Alain Prost 1985-86)
Constructors' titles	2 (1984-85)

37

*Wins scored by the
MP4/2 and MP4/4
combined*

BATTLE OF

**MP4/4**

Year	1988
Races	16
Wins	15
1-2s	10
Poles	15
Fastest laps	10
Points	199 (9-6-4-3-2-1 scoring system)
Drivers' titles	1 (Ayrton Senna, 1988)
Constructors' titles	1 (1988)

MCLAREN'S F1 LEGENDS

Ten McLarens have taken at least one world title, but which car is the greatest?

It might not be as obvious as you think

KEVIN TURNER

The MP4/4 is the greatest Formula 1 McLaren, right? It's a fan favourite, there have been arguments over its design origins and – famously – it won 15 out of 16 races in the hands of Ayrton Senna and Alain Prost in 1988. It's undoubtedly one of the finest machines to have graced the championship, but there is another car that can make a case to be the top McLaren.

The MP4/2 won more titles and more races – and managed to remain successful for three seasons despite rule tweaks and a change of tyre supplier.

The stories of both cars are well known, but a brief reminder seems appropriate. John Barnard brought the carbon-fibre monocoque to F1 with his Cosworth DFV-engined MP4/1. The car was a success, winning six times over three seasons and re-establishing the team, now run by former Project Four boss Ron Dennis, as a frontrunner following the fallow final years of the Teddy Mayer era. But Dennis knew he needed turbo power and the TAG-funded, Porsche-designed-and-built TTE PO1 was the result. Combined with Barnard's clean 'Coke bottle' aero and Michelin rubber developed in conjunction with McLaren, the 1.5-litre V6 turbo helped make the MP4/2 the car to beat in 1984.

Though other teams could turn up the boost in qualifying, the MP4/2's efficiency in a fuel-limited formula meant 12 wins from 16 races. Prost was the faster McLaren driver, but bad luck for the Frenchman and guile from Niki Lauda meant the title went to the Austrian by half a point.

McLaren's superior reliability and Prost's racecraft meant another title double in 1985, despite a switch to Goodyear tyres, reduced downforce due to late rule changes, and increased pace from rivals.

Williams-Honda was the fastest combination of 1986 but a mixture of Prost brilliance and the intra-team rivalry between Nigel Mansell and Nelson Piquet meant the MP4/2C scooped another title. Its final tally was three drivers' crowns (for two drivers), two constructors' championships and 22 grand prix wins. There were some tweaks, largely around the suspension and making the car work with a fuel allocation reduced from 220 to 195 litres, but the 1986 car was recognisably the same design that had appeared in 1984.

By 1987 the Porsche turbo was showing its age and McLaren got hold of Honda power – as well as Lotus star Senna – for 1988. Against expectations, given it was the final year of turbos being allowed in F1 (until 2014), Honda developed the all-new RA168E, which was more powerful than its normally aspirated rivals and more efficient than the other turbos. McLaren did a far better job with the Honda than Lotus and, with Mansell hamstrung by unreliable Judd engines at Williams, it perhaps wasn't a surprise that Prost and Senna had things all their own way.

Indy Lall, who worked on both cars and is now McLaren Heritage manager, remembers the team realising early on that it had something special. Having spent 12 days with the Honda-powered MP4/3B test mule in Rio with Jo Ramirez, Prost and Senna, they headed straight from there to the pre-season Imola test and the 4/4 – the work of a team led by Gordon Murray and Steve Nichols – arrived for the final day. "It was, 'Oh my God, look at this machine,'" recalls Lall. "It was quick straight out of the box and we immediately had to back things off to not show our hand."

THE VIEW FROM THE TEAM

So, which is the greatest McLaren? As with all these things, it depends who you ask. Perhaps predictably, McLaren's current chief operating officer Piers Thynne sits on the fence. "It's clear they were designed by a different person, but there's commonality," he says. "The car packaging on MP4/4 shows the focus stepped up another level, which shows in its dominance. The reliance on aero is more apparent on the MP4/4. I enjoy the stories that both designs tell, so they both go on the podium."

Lall, who was number one mechanic on Prost's car in 1984 and 1985, says "as a pure racer, winning the title with Alain means a lot", but he stops short of picking the MP4/2.

Tim Wright race engineered Prost to those 1985 and 1986 titles and does make a decision: "The MP4/2 because of its longevity. Once we got the bugs ironed out it was nice to work on and had a wider set-up window. The MP4/2 was more flexible." ➤➤



Lauda's nous edged
Prost's superior pace
for 1984 drivers' title

COLOMBO/STUDIO COLOMBO/GETTY IMAGES



Switch of tyre supplier
and late aero peg-back
couldn't stop Prost in '85

LAT/GETTY IMAGES



MP4/2C soldiered on
for 1986 to deliver
Prost's second crown

LAT/GETTY IMAGES



Brilliance of the MP4/4
ensured Senna-Prost
duopoly in 1988

LAT/GETTY IMAGES

MP4/2 delivers its power
in a rush, reports McLaren
Heritage driver Garofall...



OLLIEREAD

...while more refined
and "slicker" MP4/4
is much easier to drive



OLLIEREAD

THE VIEW FROM THE COCKPIT

McLaren Heritage driver Rob Garofall is one of the few to have put both cars through their paces. In fact, he's probably driven more models of McLaren than anyone else – around 80.

These two cars are quite different to drive, even though they produce surprisingly similar lap times (see 'Lap times snapshot' stats), partly due to the popoff valves that limited the power on later turbo F1 cars.

Just looking at the duo, you can tell the MP4/4 is much more refined than the earlier car. It also has a six-speed gearbox, whereas the MP4/2B's five-speeder is more reminiscent of the 1970s, and then you get to the engines...

"The power delivery in the MP4/4 is much more linear," says Garofall when comparing the 680bhp MP4/4 to the earlier car's 800-850bhp.

"The MP4/2 delivers in a big rush. You can see how much the technology was moving. The whole driving experience of the MP4/4 is easier.

The seating position is very different and the chassis is a lot tighter.

The cockpit is tight but it's much easier to drive."

As to which one he prefers... "It's an age thing. For me it was the Senna, Prost and Mansell era, so that's the MP4/4. I remember the MP4/4 better and, if you said to any of my kids 'draw a racing car', the MP4/4 is slicker. The MP4/2 is a little bulky but it was the start of the dominant McLarens of the era." >>

LAP TIMES SNAPSHOT MP4/2 vs MP4/4

RIO	QUALIFYING	FASTEST RACE LAP
1984	1m29.330s (Prost)	1m36.499s (Prost)
1985	1m29.117s (Prost)	1m36.702s (Prost)
1986	1m27.705s (Rosberg)	1m35.381s (Prost)
1988	1m28.096s (Senna)	1m33.540s (Prost)

MONACO	QUALIFYING	FASTEST RACE LAP
1984	1m22.661s (Prost)	1m55.596s (Prost) (wet)
1985	1m20.885s (Prost)	1m23.898s (Prost)
1986	1m22.627s (Prost) (chicanetightened)	1m26.607s (Prost)
1988	1m23.998s (Senna)	1m26.321s (Senna)

MONZA	QUALIFYING	FASTEST RACE LAP
1984	1m26.671s (Prost)	1m31.912s (Lauda)
1985	1m25.790s (Prost)	1m29.714s (Prost)
1986	1m24.514s (Prost)	1m29.221s (Rosberg)
1988	1m25.974s (Senna)	1m29.569s (Senna)

5-2

*MP4/2 titles vs
MP4/4 titles*

The MP4/2's better tallies of wins and titles were, of course, scored across three seasons. Longevity could be seen as a plus or a minus – is it better to remain competitive for longer or to have greater domination for a short period?

Going by strike rates, it's no contest, with the MP4/4 winning 94% of its races compared to 45.8% for the MP4/2. On pure pace, the older machine never had the sort of advantage enjoyed by the MP4/4, taking 'only' seven poles compared to the MP4/4's 15. The fastest lap percentages are 33% versus 63%.

When it comes to reliability, the MP4/4 was truly outstanding in an era with far greater rates of serious car problems. Prost's engine failure at the 1988 Italian GP was the MP4/4's only car-induced retirement from 32 starts, whereas Lauda *finished* just three races in 1985!

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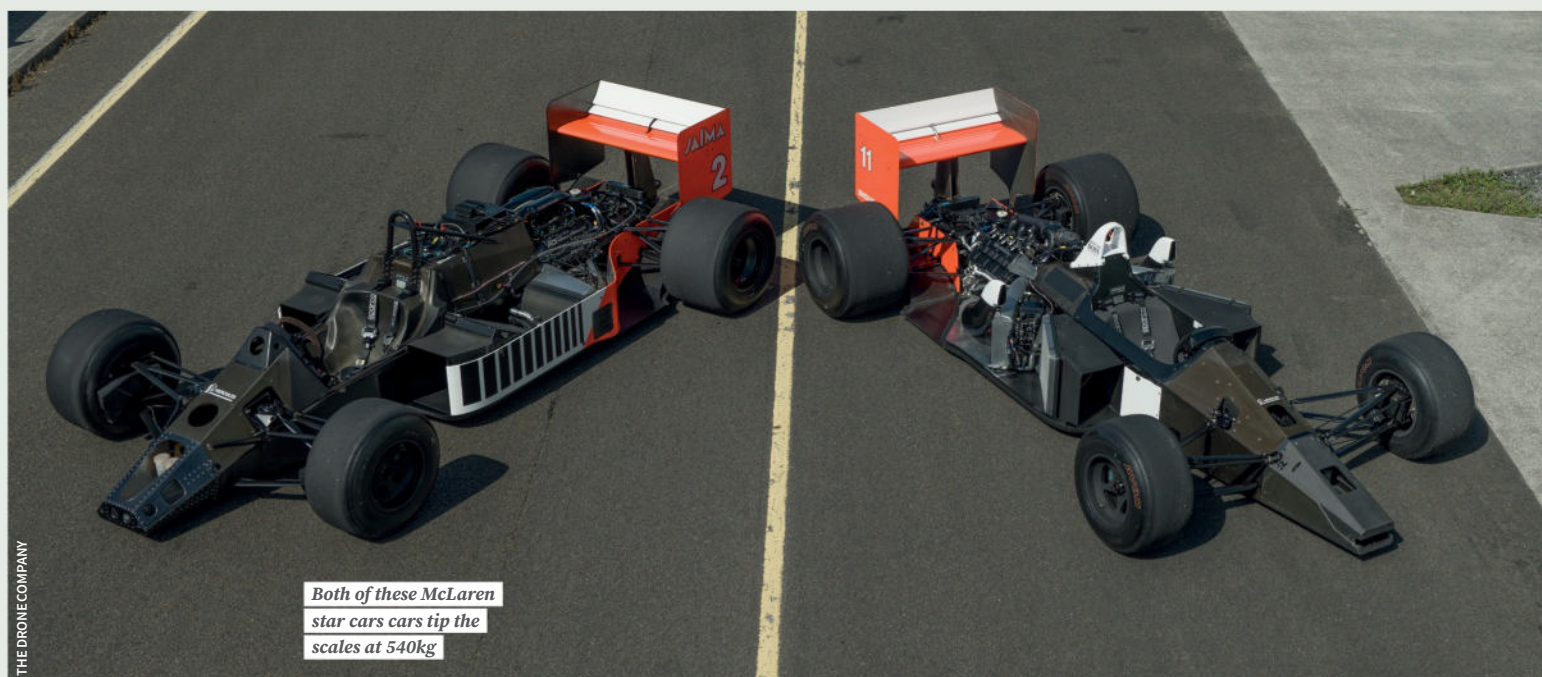


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Both of these McLaren star cars tip the scales at 540kg

THE AUTOSPORT VERDICT

When assessing the greatest cars, we also like to consider how much a particular design moved the game on. Did it change racing cars forever; what was its legacy? That's what helped the Lotus 72 scoop our Greatest Competition Car accolade in 2020. And the MP4/2 has to beat the MP4/4 in this particular game.

As well as the 'Coke bottle' bodywork that tidied up rear airflow and was widely adopted, the MP4/2's Bosch Motronic engine management system was pioneering when it came to electronics. "The breakthrough with Bosch was a big thing," confirms Lall.

The MP4/4's engine was, of course, the end of a line. And while the lowline chassis concept worked well, the Adrian Newey-designed March 881 was the season's best pointer to the future of F1 aero.

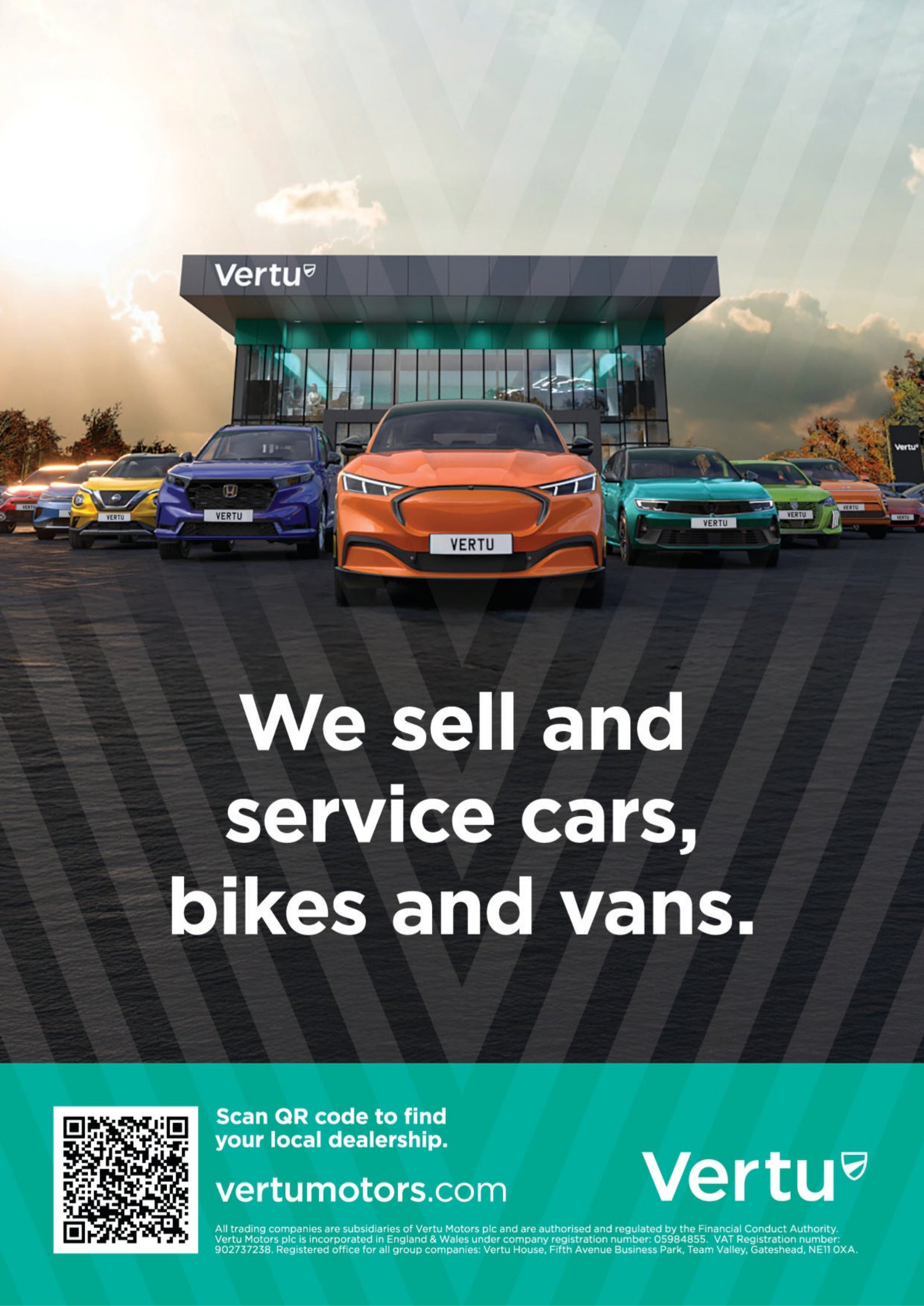
The MP4/2's importance to McLaren should not be overlooked either. It was the first Dennis-era car to win a title, starting a run of success that set McLaren as the team to beat and delivered seven drivers' and six constructors' titles in eight years. The MP4/4 was the peak of that, but it arguably also coincided with a rut for its rivals.

The MP4/2 had to contend with the growing threat of Williams-Honda and a revitalised Lotus, while Brabham and Ferrari also started its era strongly before fading. In 1988, Williams had to take customer engines and hadn't yet joined forces with Renault, Benetton was still some years away from becoming a true powerhouse, Ferrari was in one of its many periods of recovery, and Lotus was beginning its terminal decline. McLaren also had to compete *against* Senna rather than with him.

With Prost and Senna on the books and cars run by the best team in the business, McLaren probably could have won in 1988 even without a car as brilliant as the MP4/4.

The romantic vote will always go to the MP4/4. Its sheer dominance, role in the Senna-Prost story, and the fact that it delivered the great Brazilian his first F1 crown will always give it a certain mystical quality. It's also clearly the *better* car, the more-rounded package, which is what you'd expect from a later design.

But stepping back and being more objective gives a different result. The MP4/2 was more significant in F1 design, won more titles over a longer period against better opposition, and was also involved in a greater variety of storylines – from dominance in 1984 to one of the great F1 title steals in 1986. The MP4/4 represents McLaren getting close to perfection, but it was the MP4/2 that laid the foundations for it to do so. The MP4/2 is the greatest McLaren F1 car. 🌀



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'Best McLaren' candidate
the M23 carried Fittipaldi
to his second crown in 1974



SCHLEGEL MILCH/GETTY IMAGES

THE OTHER GREAT CONTENDER

The first car to bring a Formula 1 world title to the team has to be included in any discussions about McLaren's finest racer. That the M23 scored two drivers' crowns and a constructors' title, as well as 16 world championship grand prix wins, adds to its status as one of the great designs.

The work of Gordon Coppuck, who followed the wedge-shaped lead of Colin Chapman's Lotus 72, the Cosworth DFV-powered M23 arrived in 1973. Denny Hulme took pole on its debut – that was the 1967 world champion's only pole, which tells you all you need to know about the M23's pace. With no disrespect to Hulme and team-mate Peter Revson – who between them racked up three wins that season – the car probably would have been a championship contender in the hands of a topline.

That was proved when Emerson Fittipaldi defected from Lotus for 1974. Fittipaldi took three wins and, with a little help from bad luck for Niki Lauda, pipped Ferrari's Clay Regazzoni to the crown. Solo winner Hulme was seventh, but McLaren still just beat Ferrari to take its first constructors' success.

Lauda's Ferrari was unstoppable in 1975, but Fittipaldi was the closest challenger and finished second in the championship before making the shock move to his brother's team for 1976.

Developments and upgrades kept the M23 in play and a combination

of factors brought the car its second drivers' title. The first was Fittipaldi's replacement, James Hunt, arguably the car's fastest driver. The second was Lauda's horrific crash at the German GP and subsequent convalescence, which brought Hunt into title contention before he famously took the crown in the wet Fuji finale.

The M23 was so good that McLaren found it hard to replace, with some members of the team not seeing the benefit of the M26. Before the newer car got into its stride, Hunt took the M23 to three straight poles at the start of 1977, four years after its debut.

The MP4/5, which scored title doubles in 1989 and 1990, and this year's MCL39 get honourable mentions in this debate, but the MP4/2, M23 and MP4/4 are surely McLaren's three greatest F1 cars.

“HUNT TOOK THE M23 TO THREE STRAIGHT POLES AT THE START OF 1977, FOUR YEARS AFTER ITS DEBUT”



FAREWELL OR GOOD RIDDANCE?

*Formula 1's second ground-effect era is nearly at an end.
Marked by a period of Red Bull domination, was it a success or failure?*

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

PHOTOGRAPHY GETTY IMAGES



Although this rules cycle has lasted just four years, its duration does seem well-judged

It's almost time. Formula 1 awaits the auspicious knock at the door from the Grim Reaper, before the hooded harbinger's collection of its current technical rules. At the end of 2025, it will lead their passing to the great regulatory filing cabinet in the sky, leaving the door open for its all-new 2026 formula.

How will the 2022-25 era be remembered? The dust will have to settle first before objectivity enters the debate, and the two opposing strands of opinion largely become entwined. For some, the rules brought back a handful of styling cues that were missed from F1 in more recent times: low noses, ground-effect floors, and simplified wings presented a clear shift in the championship's aesthetic quality. Despite the strictness of the rules, as F1's in-house technical group developed a basis to improve the quality of on-track spectacle, the cars looked very different in 2022 – but as is always the case in any technical battleground, convergence was sure to follow.

Plus, the return of underbody venturi tunnels after a 40-year exile turned the current cars into absolute monsters through high-speed corners, at the expense of lower speeds in slower corner conditions. The positive attributes are caveated, however, since the improved effect of following other cars began to dwindle as teams developed new ways of extracting performance from the floors and rear wings.

The 2022 generation was also an incredibly finicky breed; often, tiny adjustments to ride heights would create vast swings in performance, and recent seasons have exposed their weakness to variations in track conditions. Wind has always been a factor to consider with any aerodynamics-governed pursuit, but changes in direction have often been responsible for more expansive shifts in balance.

Amid the effect of cost caps and restrictions on

aerodynamic testing, the field has closed up significantly. At this point in the year, teams are separated by hundredths of a second, not tenths, even with development reducing as resources are placed on the 2026 ruleset. Although four years appears to be only a short cycle, it seems to have been a well-judged duration.

The sense of porpoise of 2022

It's easy to forget that this rules cycle was supposed to have been in force for five years, not four; the effect of the COVID pandemic in 2020 prompted F1 to delay the introduction by one season to mitigate costs. The lack of racing in the first half of 2020 and the associated loss of income hit the teams hard, and F1 maintained a duty of care to ensure all 10 teams remained in business and could race in 2021 with largely current machinery. As such, an upgrade token system was implemented to limit the large-scale evolution from 2020 to 2021 – and work on the 2022 cars was not permitted until calendars had been leafed over into 2021.

Thus began the exploration of the new aerodynamics packages. In addition to the low noses and venturi tunnels, there was more uncharted territory for the teams to navigate: wings without 'conventional' endplates, the loss of elaborate bargeboard furniture, and the sensitivity associated with the new floors all presented challenges.

Teams that had long-serving engineers who had been around during F1's original ground-effect era, or engineers who had worked in other disciplines, could glean some knowledge of how the venturi tunnels would work, but restrictions meant that wind tunnel simulations (ie scale and air speed) did not necessarily present a full picture of the issues that would become apparent in testing.

Those issues emerged in the first Barcelona test when the cars first hit the track in anger. This was especially apparent down the back straight, where the cars began to heave at higher speeds, bouncing on their rigid suspension as the floor took pecks at the track surface. Porpoising was not a new phenomenon, but it came as an unwelcome surprise. Many theories emerged as the root cause; some suggested that it was a cyclical application of underbody suction bringing the chassis downwards, before stalling as the floor hit the track to lose that suction. Others felt it was a harmonic response to the higher airspeeds, and the outlawing of the 'third damper' at the front was unable to keep it in check.

Sauber technical director James Key – then of McLaren during 2022 – takes up the story: "It's definitely an aerodynamic phenomenon. It's some of the key vortex structures bursting and then coming back to life when you get a bit more height on the floor.

"We definitely got caught out; my theory on that is because none of the tools we've got actually do what a car does. The closest thing we've got is a wind tunnel because it's a real situation, but it hasn't got suspension, it doesn't sit on its tyres, it's got totally different sort >>



Key, at McLaren in 2022, admits teams were initially caught out

FOX



First race of the era in Bahrain won from pole by Charles Leclerc's Ferrari



Evolution of McLaren wings from 2022 (left) to 2025 as aero understanding consolidated



Convergence inevitable as cost cap and testing rules have closed up the field

The hoisting of Perez's
shunted Red Bull at
Monaco in 2023...



M. SUTTON/SUTTON IMAGES

...showed secrets of
all-conquering RB19's
trick floor arrangement



THOMPSON

of inertias and weights and all that sort of thing and it's got different aero-elasticity. You weren't going to get that from a wind tunnel. Some did detect certain things in the wind tunnel but it wasn't like what we saw on track. You don't see it in a simulator because your wind tunnel data doesn't contain it. I've asked all sorts of questions, like, 'Why didn't you simulate this?' but there was no data to tell us it was going to happen. None of the tools could tell us what was going on."

Reflecting on the driving experience of the early 2022 cars, Esteban Ocon says that it was "horrible" to manage the porpoising effect. The drivers were concerned by potential trauma, particularly to their backs, and the continual motion affecting the brain. Ocon adds that the overall mass of the car itself, particularly in the low speed, led to a low initial opinion of the formula.

"Nobody saw it coming," remembers Ocon. "And then we arrived into the first test, and we were like, 'What is that? That's horrible!' It was really not nice, super-stiff, hurting in a bad way, heavy cars at low speeds. It was pretty terrifying in the beginning. But now, it's looking like much more of this 2020 era, where we are doing very quick lap times. The cars are extremely quick. The balance is becoming to be almost perfect, and you need little details to make it good. And it's a bit more compliant than it was."

Much of the porpoising was mitigated by the introduction of an 'aerodynamic oscillation metric', implemented by the FIA to force teams to stiffen their floors and stop them flexing the floor edges. The flex was to create a skirt-like effect to evoke the early ground-effect designs from the 1980s and minimise the coalescence of managed airflow underneath and tyre wake – but it came at the cost of worsening the porpoising effect. The FIA permitted floor 'stays' attached to the chassis: small metal rods attached to a bracket to maintain the floor position.

The FIA also mandated a change in floor fence height for 2023, effectively raising the minimum ride heights universally. Ride height was the absolute governing factor in the performance of the floor; getting the car to work consistently at the lowest possible ride height delivers downforce peaks – but the demands of a circuit and the level of bumpiness forces teams to raise them again. So the floor should be able to work in all conditions.

"Thinking back, the challenge definitely was to understand how you could run the car as low as it wanted to be run, and then how you can rebalance it," says Williams chief engineer Dave Robson. "That's what has ultimately led to where we are now – where front wings are a very powerful way of rebalancing the kind of low car.

"Very early on you had to make a decision whether you went for the easy-to-find downforce with the car running very low, and then deal with all the consequences, or whether you decided that you couldn't deal with the consequences within the regulations. Then you had to

make the difficult decision to try and find downforce elsewhere, which naturally on a ground effect car is much more difficult. But the less you need to rely on the car running low, the better it is to set the car up to ride well, and the easier it is to get the balance."

Through 2022, porpoising was not entirely eradicated, but it became significantly less of a factor as development and the FIA's intervention was able to redefine the underbody formula. Through the following seasons, bouncing did occasionally rear its head; Ferrari, for example, had unwittingly reintroduced that vertical instability with its floor upgrade for the 2024 Spanish Grand Prix, something that afflicted it in high-speed corners when in yaw and when aero load was high. This prompted the team to roll back on that floor for the British GP at Silverstone, before a revised floor option at the Hungaroring set the record straight.

How Sergio Perez's 2023 crashes led to field convergence

It's not unusual for anyone to suffer a shunt at Monaco; it only takes one snatch of the brakes to book a one-way trip into the wall. Red Bull driver Sergio Perez had his own moment at Sainte Devote during FP1 in 2023.

Monaco being Monaco, the only way to remove the all-conquering RB19 was to hoist it onto a crane and lift it into the sky to be deposited off-track.

Naturally, the fraternity of paddock snappers were in full force to capture the dangling Red Bull, with a series of images disseminating online – and into the laps of the other teams. Red Bull, which was part-way through its eventual run of 14 straight victories, had one of its biggest secrets exposed on a public stage. Cue engineers becoming increasingly curious about the complexity of the curvature underneath the RB19; presumably, a flurry of virtual facsimiles were circulated through the aero >>



departments at the nine other teams on the grid.

“What was difficult to get your head around to begin with was just how complicated aerodynamically the floors are,” says Robson, “and when you started to get a glimpse of those early Red Bull floors when they would occasionally get lifted up on cranes, and you realise these things can and need to be unbelievably complicated geometrically, that then sets a whole new requirement of what your CFD and approach needed to be.

“There was a period where we would look at those Red Bull floors and think, ‘Well, what’s the process at which they even decided that was the right thing to do aerodynamically?’, and I think that then highlighted some areas where we were maybe a little bit lacking in the process of how you develop the geometry. That was quite a big change, and quite a big challenge.”

Although a two-dimensional representation of Red Bull’s three-dimensional complexities, the view of the RB19’s secrets ultimately gave the other teams a bit of a lead on where to look for development. Perez’s subsequent crash in Hungary that year only increased the attention on the geometry of the floor – and the resurgence of McLaren through the year and into 2024 provided Red Bull with an increasingly sterner challenge as the formula continued to remain in place.

Red Bull also informed the direction of other aspects of the car, such as its ramped sidepod solution. Ferrari and Mercedes had taken very different approaches – Ferrari with its square-sided flanks, Mercedes with its ‘zeropod’ solution – as they hoped to generate rear-end downforce through an in-washing approach to the flow around the rear of the car. But Red Bull’s solution delivered that cleaner flow and produced the top-surface pressure mapping necessary to extract more downforce from the rear, and more teams began to fall in line with that particular concept.

Were the rules a success?

Although the F1 cars lived up to some of the stakeholders’ hopes that they would help to improve the on-track spectacle, at least early on, much of the effect has been diluted. It’s not up to the teams to maintain a specific wake pattern to reduce the effect on the car behind, and the added complexity of front wings and circumvention of the rear wing-to-endplate interface has increased the capacity of the overall wake shed.

It’s also true that, while the current rules were initially developed with the plan to remove DRS, the overtaking aid was still required – the reduction in slipstream effect produced by the 2022 generation gave the device a stay of execution.

The DRS effect has been reduced by continued developments, specifically at low-downforce circuits because the teams have been able to run with much less rear wing thanks to the floor’s downforce output and, as the cars have got better, the ‘racing product’ has been a bit more of a tough sell. Yet, that’s natural for a pretty static ruleset, and the addition of cost cap and aero testing regulations have ultimately brought the field closer together.

From a driver’s perspective, they’ve not necessarily been the most satisfying cars to pedal around a circuit. The size and weight have tended to make them feel like turning an oil tanker around in low-speed conditions, but they’ve generally liked the adhesion and the speed in longer-radius corners.

“The overtaking has definitely improved,” Ocon reckons. “That’s been one of the positives of this ruleset. Especially when it was first introduced in 2022, we really saw a big difference. If you look at Zandvoort, how close we were following each other, even through that last corner. When you have DRS, you stay within seven, eight tenths of the whole lap, which is quite impressive.”

“They were obviously designed around the ability to overtake,” Key explains. “I guess that got a bit diluted, I don’t think anyone could have said that we’d have the downforce numbers we have now, which are absolutely huge and obviously everything after the car gets affected by that, so I’m not sure if we 100% achieved the ability to overtake easier. But it certainly didn’t degrade it, and it probably is a little easier to follow than it was in 2020 and 2021, so I think it kind of semi-achieved that goal.”

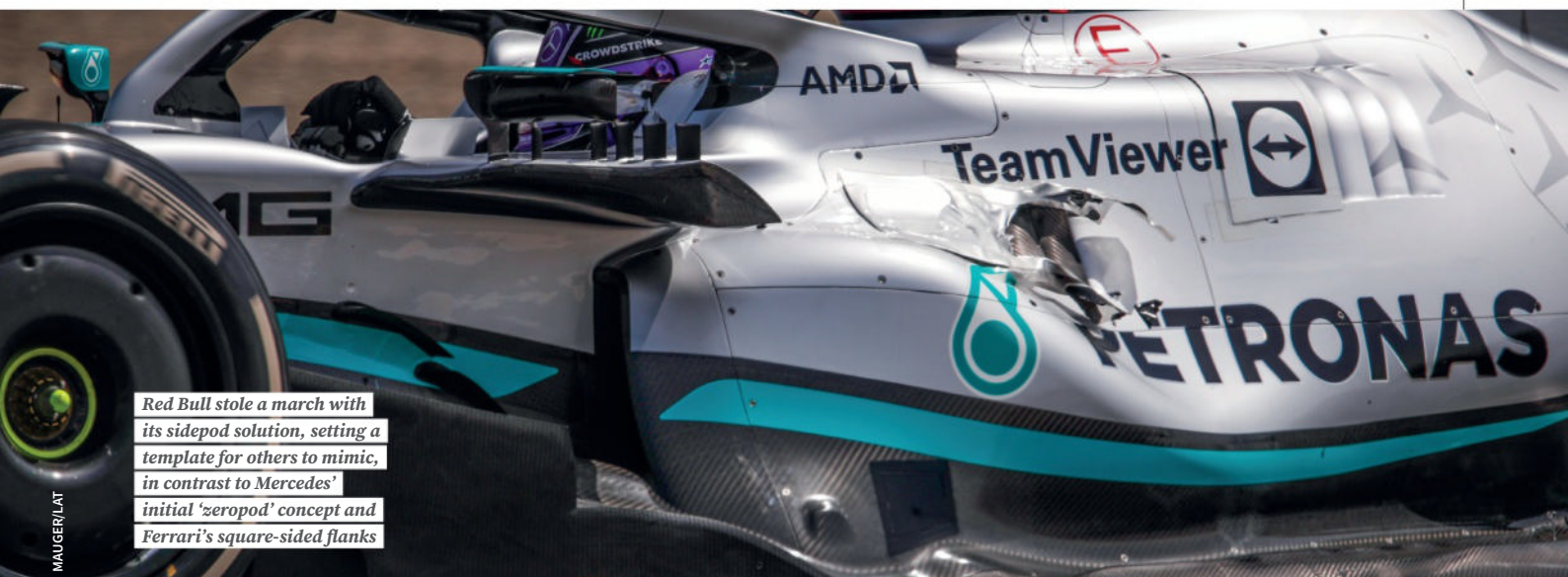
That dilution has been apparent in 2025, with races often being defined by the order emerging out of the first corner. As with all things, the 2022-25 regulations have had a balance of good and bad attributes. While most in F1 are resistant to change, they ultimately adapt to their new surroundings and revised metrics – and, more often than not, excel.

When 2026 comes around, that will be important to remember. Change is good; the new regulations will test drivers and engineers, and reward those most welcoming to them. We can remember the old fondly, but must be open to the new. 🏁

Current rules’ positive impact on overtaking welcomed by Ocon

GALLOWAY/LAT







RUSSELL AT MERCEDES

Starts	89
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Poles	7
Fastest laps	11
Points	956
Championship positions	4th, 8th, 6th, 4th

Up to and including 2025 Mexican GP

F1 2025'S OTHER STAR

Masked by Mercedes making a mid-season technical mis-step, noise surrounding contractual wrangles, and a three-way battle for the championship developing up front, George Russell has had the most convincing season of his F1 career so far

STUART CODLING

PHOTOGRAPHY GETTY IMAGES

There is a school of thought that George Russell earned his promotion to Mercedes at precisely the wrong time, for it coincided with that team's plunge from frontrunner to also-ran in the new ground-effect era. That's one way of looking at it; another is to say that those circumstances have been the making of him.

Undoubtedly Mercedes' fall from grace has Russell in a competitive hinterland rather than in a consistently race-winning car. But it has also enabled him to develop his craft outside the spotlight – and, crucially, never having to play the compliant number-two role to a seven-time world champion looking for their eighth.

Russell has always been self-confident and demanding; it's difficult to imagine how being alongside Lewis Hamilton in a championship-worthy car would have panned out. When Mercedes actually let its drivers race each other for wins, in 2016, the outcome was ugly. The alternative of hiring Valtteri Bottas to ride shotgun also ended badly. Rewatch the start and first corner of the 2021 Mexican Grand Prix, as Bottas leaves the door flapping in the breeze for Max Verstappen; the work of a man who knows he is out of a drive at the end of the season and has given up (the resultant swing in points also ended up costing Hamilton the world championship).

Not only has Russell been spared a profoundly demoralising “George, it's James” moment, but he has also had three seasons in which the frustrations of driving cars that are only sporadically competitive have been salved by him doing a largely better job than Hamilton of adapting to the characteristics of ground-effect F1 machinery. And this year he has elevated his game further, even though Mercedes remains mired in the ‘front-midfield’.

The season-opening Australian GP set the tone: Russell qualified strongly in fourth place, behind the two McLarens and Max Verstappen, and finished on the podium as Oscar Piastri fell foul of the changeable conditions. Granted, he benefited from being in the right place on track at the optimum time to capitalise on the final shift to intermediate tyres, but he didn't put a wheel wrong on a day where others blundered.

Three more podiums followed before the ill-fated shift to a new rear suspension geometry, which defined the middles of Mercedes' season. Among these was a truly remarkable second place in Bahrain. Again, this was partially a factor of others making mistakes, but Russell's car was barely driveable in the final portion of the race owing to an electronics glitch.

For Imola in May, Mercedes introduced a new rear-suspension geometry intended to reduce the tendency of the rear to lift under braking. The benefits of this are predominantly aerodynamic, since rear ride height is critical to the floor's performance, but it also theoretically reduces the tendency of the rear brakes to lock under the forwards' weight transfer during braking. Reduction of driver ‘feel’ is a known consequence of this type of suspension geometry, but

the results in Mercedes' simulation tools suggested that the gains would outweigh the consequences.

Another target of the new rear suspension was to exercise more control over tyre temperatures. For the past few seasons the Mercedes cars have tended to overheat the surface of the rear tyres, which can help in terms of preparing them for a flying lap in qualifying but is problematic over a race distance. It has become a limitation in that Mercedes tends only to show well at venues with cold ambients – such as Las Vegas, where Russell won last year.

After so-so initial driver feedback, Mercedes reverted to its previous suspension spec for Monaco before refitting the anti-lift set-up from June's Canadian GP onwards. There Russell won, and new team-mate Andrea Kimi Antonelli claimed his first F1 podium, but this contributed to the team losing its way in the summer. The new suspension made the car less stable, sapping driver confidence, and a run of tracks with different characteristics and ambient temperatures added to the confusion. Montreal, where all the braking is done in a straight line and there are no real high-speed corners, masked the upgrade's shortcomings. Reverting definitively to the original rear suspension from the Hungarian GP onwards helped Russell and Antonelli make more of what they had, but there would be no more upgrades coming as Mercedes pivoted to its 2026 project.

In parallel with this, team boss Toto Wolff has made little secret of establishing connections with Verstappen and his management team. Red Bull's woes over the past 18 months have made Max more available than he otherwise might – a fact not lost on Wolff and other team bosses, who have been circling like suitors at a Regency dance. This, alongside the arrival of highly rated rookie Antonelli with a lot of personal Wolff energy invested in his career, must have prompted Russell to wonder whether he was enjoying as much love as he deserved from the team that has supported him since the junior formulas.

Not that he said as much in public, declaiming it as “noise” that he only has to deal with on the Thursdays of grand prix weekends, where questions about his contractual status were as inevitable as Christmas. But it was more than just noise. Russell's relationship >>



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MASON, DUNBAR/LAT



“Wolff and other team bosses have been circling like suitors at a Regency dance”



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POTTS/LAT

"Now or never" move on
Verstappen in Austin sprint
demonstrated fighting spirit

"Being clearly the leader of the team, senior driver in the team, it comes naturally"

with Mercedes – Wolff has a finger in his management pie, a common thread among some team bosses on the grid – adds a layer of complexity to contract talks. Continuity is by no means a given, and yet it is harder to escape. After Russell won in Canada there were those who opined that this strengthened his hand in the ongoing negotiations. Well, yes and no – for it also added to the illusion that Russell had more agency over his future than he actually did. For his part, Wolff continued to bat away any questions about the renewal of the soon-to-expire contract.

"You know, he's been so long with us and he's growing," Wolff said after Russell's first win of 2025. "The steps he's made from being a young driver in Williams, then coming to Mercedes at a difficult time, being on par with Lewis. And then since Lewis left, being clearly the leader of the team, senior driver in the team, and it comes naturally.

"It's not like there's some politics. It's just taking the place that he merits and deserves. The ambience in

the team is great. And we've agreed on some kind of timeline when we want to settle these things. You know, with triple headers getting in the way and one race after the other now in June and July. But... We're going to get there."

Following what was, by Mercedes' usual standards, a terse announcement to the effect that both its drivers would be continuing into 2026, Wolff framed the process as having been inevitable. The dalliance with Verstappen was airbrushed from history – for now.

"It was always the decision that we took from the get-go," Wolff said in Austin in October. "It was the line-up that we chose last year. We knew that George can hold up the leadership role in there. It's been really great. And Kimi is having a learning year. So going forward, it was pretty much a no-brainer."

Mercedes has always said it didn't want its drivers' contractual status to become a constant talking point. If so, it has fallen short in this regard. Just as Bill Murray was awakened daily in the movie *Groundhog Day* by the strains of Sonny and Cher performing *I Got You Babe*, questions about contracts have occupied pole position at pretty much every Mercedes press call this season. The team has been in an invidious position: given Antonelli's youth and inexperience, it makes sense to keep him on a rolling annual contract, but, with disruption coming in the form of new rules in 2026, a driver of Russell's stature would want a potential 'out' if Mercedes falls short next year.

That dictates different contractual arrangements that would, inherently, be conversation fodder. Hence the absence of specificity in the renewal announcement, which positioned Russell as being on a "multi-year" deal. It's understood that it is a 'one plus one' including exit clauses on either side.

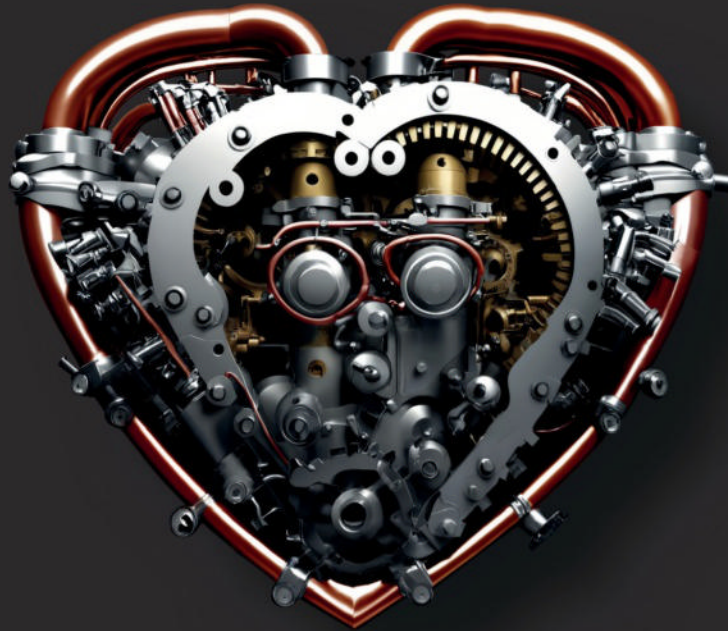
"I'm really happy to be continuing," was Russell's »

MUTTON/FORMULA 1



Wolff having a hand in his
driver's management adds
complexity to contract talks

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ROSE/FORMULA1

**Singapore polesitter
Russell imperious on
his way to victory**

“I’m very happy, because Toto could have been substantially tighter if he wanted to be”

carefully phrased summation after the announcement. “Because the truth is, if every single seat was available for next year, and I could choose any single team to race for, I believe Mercedes is my best chance of winning the championship next year.

“I’m very happy, to be honest, because given the situation and circumstances with me and the team, Toto could have been substantially tighter if he wanted to be. But I think he really recognises that you need to reward those who are delivering, who are putting in the effort and delivering those results on track. And, as I said, that’s why I’m here with a smile on my face, because I’m very happy with the offer, and as I said, he could have been much tighter if he wanted to be.”

There is certainly no faulting Russell’s work ethic or his determination to “deliver”, in his words. Insiders talk about his single-minded commitment to ensuring that every performance variable can be made to work in his favour; he is famously demanding of his engineers and mechanics, but is equally demanding of himself. In Baku he dragged himself out of his sick bed to race, despite being in a “world of pain” with flu.

And there’s been no letting up after signing his contract for 2026 and beyond. During the sprint race in Austin he launched an attack on leader Verstappen, which Russell framed as a “now or never” move. Even Verstappen, no stranger to late lunges, described it as “a bit optimistic”. Many in the paddock view Russell as a driver in the classic Alain Prost style, calculating and slightly risk-averse, so the buccaneering nature of this manoeuvre made it all the more noticeable – especially in the context of a sprint where nothing much had happened after the inevitable first-corner fracas.

In Mexico, Russell engaged in a protracted period of horse trading with the pitwall to persuade them to tell Antonelli to let him past so he could have a crack at

Ollie Bearman’s Haas. He not only assured them that he had the pace to do it, but promised he would give up the position to his team-mate again if he couldn’t make a pass on Bearman stick. In the event, Mercedes failed to seize the moment, dithering for nearly 10 laps before issuing the order, by which time the opportunity had largely passed by.

It was another example of Russell thinking independently and, indeed, stridently. At Austin, Autosport asked him what he had done to find a whole new competitive level this season – and whether there was an element of feeling he really had to demonstrate that he was the man for the team leader role rather than anyone else.

“I wasn’t quite thinking, ‘F***’em, I’ll show ’em’. But it’s more, you’re just looking for those smallest of margins to take your level to the next step,” he said. “And I think there isn’t one particular thing that has been the difference. I think it’s a contribution of confidence with my own ability, confidence with the car beneath me, confidence with my group of engineers who are the ones who directly impact my own performance. So yeah, and I guess psychologically as well.

“I’ve got a very good group of people around me, away from the track, that help me to be in the right place when I come to the circuit. So none of this external noise. It’s only noise on a Thursday. And it’s kind of in one ear, out the other and moving forward.”

If Mercedes can come out of the blocks as strongly in 2026 as it did in 2014, when the hybrid era began, that will partner Russell with the car he deserves. Austin proved that he’s willing to go wheel to wheel with Verstappen – with the right car, that could be happening week-in, week-out next season. And that is a truly tantalising prospect. ✎

MAURICE HAMILTON'S

ALTERNATIVE VIEW

F1's radio messages are often just groans, but there was a time when they were novel

Gamesmanship in Formula 1? Tell me about it. I've had my moments. You doubtless saw manoeuvring at the Circuit of The Americas when a public-spirited Red Bull team member kindly removed an untidy piece of tape that someone from McLaren had stuck on the pitwall to assist Lando Norris position his car in the grid box?... The paltry (in F1 terms) £50,000 fine handed down to Red Bull was a clumsy response to what was actually no more than a bit of skullduggery. If I was in charge of Red Bull at the next race, I would have crossed the grid and offered Lando a seat cushion to help the poor wee lad see where he was going.

In case officials miss any 'foul play', there's always the radio frequency in which to loudly gripe about your grievance. It's a development that was beyond F1's wildest imagining in the mid 1980s, when the plug-in umbilical cord linking engineer to driver and car gave way to radio transmission and the snivelling support lines we have now.

It was obvious back then that the ability to eavesdrop would greatly assist a journalist when discovering what was *really* going on – as opposed to the sanitised quotes delivered in a press release. But how? I heard about a plane spotter who listened to air traffic control by means of a scanner. These devices were prohibitively expensive in the UK, but I was told that the USA would be a different matter.

Shortly after arrival in Detroit for the grand prix in 1987, I had chosen my secret weapon in the local Radio Shack store. That was the easy bit. Discovering each F1 team's radio frequency would be far trickier since I could hardly give the game away by asking them outright. Nor could I proudly display the scanner in the pitlane for all to see.

By a stroke of good fortune, my hotel was within the Renaissance Center, which overlooked the track. I spent the first practice session sitting in my room, watching the scanner do its work as it flicked back and forth through the wave band. It was soon apparent that a team member needed to be speaking to the driver – or vice versa – at the very moment the scanner passed that particular frequency. Otherwise, you would miss the brief conversation. I became well-versed in the activities of local taxi and delivery companies. But time was marching on and I had no idea what was happening on the track. Then, a moment of magic.

"OK, Ayrton. Let's try the Bs. That might help the understeer."

The room was suddenly filled with the booming voice of Peter Warr as the Lotus boss discussed tyre compounds with Ayrton Senna. Bingo! During the next two practice sessions, I caught a few more fish in the audio net. A couple of races later, I had most of the top teams.

The trick, of course, was not to give the game away by quoting private conversations in my race reports. But at least I was well informed and could avoid the trap of looking foolish through erroneous assumptions. This happy state of 'knowledge is power' lasted for quite some time before other journalists caught on and the teams, listening to each other in any case, began to encrypt their messages. In the meantime, there had been intriguing moments of listening pleasure.

Nigel Mansell provided regular entertainment with his constant chatter, particularly during the races when, if everything was going well, he would actually sing to the Williams crew. However, there was a puzzling development towards the end of 1987 when Nigel was fighting for the championship with Nelson Piquet. Qualifying was under way at Suzuka when a wordless but low, moaning sound came across the airwaves. It transpired that Mansell had spun into the barrier and injured his back by crash-landing on top of a kerb. It gradually dawned on me that Nigel may have been in enough pain to rule himself out of the championship but, somehow, he had managed to bravely keep his thumb on the radio button in the immediate aftermath of such a bruising shunt.

The most bizarre moment of all came at the start of practice for the 1989 British GP when the Arrows of Derek Warwick failed to complete its installation lap. 'Del Boy' had simply disappeared.

"Where are you, Derek?" I heard a puzzled Ross Brawn intone. Then a pause before his driver replied: "Dunno."

"Whatd'yamean?"

"Can't find the entrance to the f*****g pitlane!"

"This happy state of 'knowledge is power' lasted for some time before other journalists caught on"

I'm stuck somewhere."

This was at a time when the track was flat-out through Abbey and into a left-right chicane just before Woodcote. When Warwick had driven at Silverstone a few months before, the pit entrance was actually the continuation of the straight leading from Abbey; in other words, a very fast entry. Nobody had thought to tell Derek that the entrance had been shifted to the far side of the chicane. Warwick had steamed into what was now an escape road and become disorientated, not to mention stuck in a concrete-lined cul-de-sac.

McLaren may think they've got their troubles but there's a massive difference between being a couple of millimetres out of position on the starting grid and the driver not turning up at all. These days, they would complain – on the radio, of course – that someone must have hijacked their car. 🏎️



McLaren tape positioned, for now, on Austin pitwall

RONALDVORING



Scanner-equipped scribe earwiggled Senna tyre talk

SUTTON IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES



Mansell's post-shunt moans were relayed

LAT/GETTY IMAGES



Radio traffic in F1 slanted for ears outside of the team? Surely not

THOMPSON/GETTY IMAGES



WHAT IS F1'S GREATEST TITLE SHOWDOWN?

The 2025 season could be heading for a title decider in Abu Dhabi, so it seemed a good time for Autosport staffers to pick out their favourite finales



2010 ABU DHABI GP JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

Four drivers remained in title contention for the 2010 finale in Abu Dhabi, which ladled further excitement onto a season saturated in championship narrative shifts. Due to the season's ebb and flow,

it was an interesting quirk that the championship leader heading into a race did not win at any point.

Fernando Alonso hoped to break that curse going into the last round of the year. He topped the standings with 246 points, although Red Bull's pairing of Mark Webber and Sebastian Vettel had closed the gap at the penultimate round in Brazil – Webber had 238 points, Vettel 231. Lewis Hamilton, on 222 points, needed to win, and have

Alonso's Ferrari register no points to have a chance.

Everything went smoothly for Vettel. He converted pole into an early lead and later, the victory, but had to endure an agonising wait as the fortunes of Alonso and Webber were not yet clear. Alonso lost a place off the line to a fast-starting Jenson Button, putting him fourth, while Webber preserved his starting position of fifth. The two pitted early after struggling on soft tyres, which ultimately put them behind first-lap stopper Vitaly Petrov as they clawed through the traffic.

Petrov, who had produced a solid-if-unspectacular rookie year with Renault, chose Abu Dhabi to deliver a defensive masterclass and contained Alonso and Webber for the whole race. When Nico Rosberg and Robert Kubica pitted later and cleared the train, Alonso's and Webber's championship assaults were in tatters.

Vettel had to wait for Alonso and Webber to cross the line, but it was worth the agony: the crown was his by four points.



2008 BRAZILIAN GP FIL CLEEREN

There are plenty of factors that make a good title showdown, but not knowing the identity of the world champion until the final corner of the final race is pretty hard to beat in my book.

After an up-and-down 2008 season, the title was still Lewis Hamilton's to lose, but a downpour minutes before the start set the scene for an unforgettable afternoon. A season's worth of drama spilled out onto a soaked Interlagos track, that iconic Sao Paulo bowl packed to the rafters with Brazilian fans cheering on one of the two title protagonists. In what would be his final grand prix win, Felipe Massa hit pole-to-flag perfection in his Ferrari, while points leader Hamilton, who had started his McLaren from a safe fourth, suddenly found himself on the outside looking in after a cautious pit strategy.

Following a dry spell the rain returned towards the end of race, with Hamilton losing his crucial fifth position to Sebastian Vettel. After that it looked game, set and match for Massa... until Hamilton passed the slick-tyred Toyota of Timo Glock for fifth in the final corner of the race. The confusion meant we were treated to the surreal scene of two different crews and families celebrating a world championship within the space of 30 seconds. It also set the stage for an emotionally charged podium ceremony, with magnanimous Massa saluting the Brazilian fans despite the bitter heartbreak.



1986 AUSTRALIAN GP KEVIN TURNER

Championship finales fought out between team-mates or rivals from different squads can be great, but the 1986 Australian GP had intra-team tension and an outside contender.

Williams had the fastest package in 1986 – as well as two top drivers in Nelson Piquet and Nigel Mansell. And arguably the season's best driver kept himself in contention with relentless consistency and the odd bit of magic – McLaren's Alain Prost.

Mansell arrived in Australia six points ahead of Prost, with Piquet one point further back. At a time when nine points were awarded for victory, the advantage was with Mansell. The Briton duly took pole and ran where he needed to for much of the race, while Prost's team-mate Keke Rosberg put in one of his great drives to lead 56 of the 82 laps. Prost and Piquet also provided action, Prost going on a charge after a pitstop thanks to a puncture, and Piquet suffering a spin but quickly recovering past Mansell.

The big drama arrived in the final 20 laps. Rosberg pulled out of the lead with tyre failure, Prost passed Mansell and then the Williams-Honda's left-rear tyre burst spectacularly down the back straight. Piquet was now in position to take the crown, but he was called in for a precautionary tyre change. He chased Prost but fell 4.2s short and the Frenchman retained his title after a roller coaster of a race. His was one of the great F1 campaigns – and got the fitting finale the season deserved.



2021 ABU DHABI GP OLEG KARPOV

An overtake on a championship rival on the last lap of the final race of the season, after months of drama and controversy – nothing really beats that. F1 will probably never again come as close to a Hollywood-

style ending as Abu Dhabi 2021. Yet it will forever carry that bitter aftertaste of the race direction breaking its own rules to create it.

Still, the conclusion of the Lewis Hamilton-Max Verstappen title fight somehow felt fitting for what that season had been. Both were utterly deserving of the championship. Both delivered remarkable performances. And it's almost impossible to say who truly 'deserved' it more. The fact that they arrived in Abu Dhabi level on points says it all: each had done everything possible to claim the crown.

That's why neither could really feel like they lost. Because suggesting Hamilton wasn't worthy of an eighth title that night would be dishonest. But at the same time, it's hard to argue Verstappen didn't merit becoming champion either. He seized the only opportunity that came his way, and his season was no less impressive than Hamilton's. In the end, Abu Dhabi 2021 has become part of F1 folklore. Whether you see it as a disgrace or as the most fitting conclusion to one of the sport's greatest battles, one thing is clear: it was a finale after which both drivers could walk away feeling undefeated – even if for one of them, it was only a moral victory.



Let us know what you think is F1's greatest finale – email autosport@autosport.com

SINGLE SEATERS





Slater's Monza glory

Rising single-seater star Freddie Slater's seemingly inexorable progress continued at the end of October when he clinched his fourth championship title in two years – this time the Formula Regional European crown. The 17-year-old Prema driver, about whom Autosport last year drew parallels with Lando Norris, no less, enjoyed a near-perfect weekend at the Monza season finale, winning race one from second on the grid – which secured the championship, a first for a British driver – and following that up the next day with victory from pole. “Finishing the season with two wins at Monza is pretty special,” said BRDC SuperStar Slater, who will graduate to FIA Formula 3 full-time in 2026.

Photographer Alex Galli

Where Monza, Italy

When Friday 24 October 2025

Details Canon EOS R6 MkII
EF100-400mm lens,
1/2500th @ F5.6



SKIBINSKI/PEC

Among Herta's opposition is Camara (below)



GRIGGITHS/FORMULA 1/GETTY IMAGES

FORMULA 2

HERTA JOINS HITECH FOR F2

IndyCar star Colton Herta's move to Formula 2 is to be with Hitech GP – the Silverstone-based team that's just a six-minute stroll down the Dadford Road from the Cadillac Formula 1 squad with which he is bidding to break into grand prix racing for 2027.

Hitech is on course for its best season in F2, with Luke Browning leading the operation to second in the teams' points with two rounds remaining.

"I know it won't be easy – learning the car, the tyres, the tracks – but I'm approaching this with determination, focus and a lot of motivation," said Herta. "My goal is to compete at the front, continue developing as a driver, and put myself in the best position for a future in F1."

"He already brings a level of experience, professionalism and talent that we're typically used to nurturing in drivers as they progress through the junior categories," said team manager Clive Hatton of the 25-year-old.

Herta is just one of a raft of drivers announced for the 2026 F2 campaign. Among them is newly crowned F3 champion Rafael

Camara, who is following in the footsteps of his title-holding predecessors Gabriel Bortoleto and Leonardo Fornsoli by joining Invicta Racing.

The bespectacled Brazilian Ferrari protege has a tough act to follow – Bortoleto won the F2 crown as a rookie and Fornsoli leads the 2025 points – but said that Invicta "has shown time and again that it knows how to develop young drivers".

Camara will have experience alongside him at the Norfolk equipe in the form of Joshua Durksen, the Paraguayan who has won three races in his two seasons of F2 with AIX Racing.

Two more stars of the F3 season also have seats confirmed for their graduation. Bulgarian Red Bull Junior Nikola Tsolov stays with Campos Racing for his step up to F2, while McLaren-supported Norwegian Martinus Stenshorne has secured a berth

at Rodin Motorsport. Stenshorne has already made an early F2 debut with Trident in Baku, where he qualified and ran in the leading group but failed to finish either race.

As Herta joins Hitech, Ferrari Driver Academy member Dino Beganovic heads through the exit door with one win in his pocket this season. The Swede's destination is the French DAMS team.

- Herta will also contest three IMSA SportsCar Championship rounds with Cadillac in one of Wayne Taylor Racing's V-Series.R LMDhs. His recruitment is the only change at Caddy across the two WTR and solo Action Express Racing GTP entries. Herta will line up alongside full-season drivers Jordan Taylor and Louis Deletraz at the Daytona 24 Hours, Sebring 12 Hours and Petit Le Mans enduros.



FRAVER/PEC

ANDRETTI CALLS TIME ON CAREER

The Andretti dynasty as Indycar racers is at an end after over six decades, with Marco Andretti's decision to hang up his helmet.

Two-time IndyCar race winner Andretti, 38, has been an Indy 500-only driver for the past five years, and has called time on his career to be with his daughter, attend to his businesses and write his memoirs.

His legendary grandfather Mario Andretti won the 500 just once in 1969 and, like his dad Michael, Marco was never able to conquer the family jinx at the Brickyard, although his record of four top-three finishes is a joint Andretti best alongside Mario. Great-uncle John was another to win in Indycars, while uncle Jeff and great-great-uncle Aldo also competed in Indy/Champ Cars.

"I had six legitimate shots at victory with Andretti Autosport," said Marco. "I will never forget the rare circumstance of getting to race my dad in the closing laps for the win there – the pressure of participating in a dramatic Bump Day in 2011 to a pole position in 2020. That is what the Indy 500 produces: extremes on both ends. That is why I love and appreciate it so much."

"Competing at the top level of North American motorsport is and has been an honour for me, even in the tough times."



TATUUS

FREGIONAL

NEW TATUUS
BREAKS COVER

The Formula Regional European Championship is to no longer be powered by Alpine, with three-cylinder turbocharged Toyota engines to be installed in the category's second-generation model, the Tatuus T-326.

Tatuus launched the car in late October, with the news that its power will come from the same base TOM'S-supplied engine to be used in the Dallara-equipped Eurocup-3, Euroformula Open and Japanese Super Formula Lights series, albeit prepared by Tatuus sister company Autotecnica Motori.

Giovanni Delfino, CEO of Korus Group, the new parent company of Tatuus and ATM, outlined that the T-326 "was co-designed with the FIA technical department because it will be an official FIA championship – for us being chosen for an official FIA championship means a lot".

He added that whereas the Dallara-equipped championships run outside the FIA umbrella, "when we decided

to use that engine we signed with Toyota [and TOM'S] an agreement that ATM was the single manufacturer to homologate the engine in the Formula Regional version. For us it was clear that we didn't want to create any competition with builders with the same engine."

When asked whether the T-326 is lighter than its predecessor, the T-318, Delfino stressed that the demands of working with the FIA mean that safety is the priority.

"The compliance with the FIA technical specs means that the chassis's stronger, all the crash structures stronger," he said. "Saying 'stronger' means 'heavier', that's for sure. What we tried to do was to be lighter on all the other parts of the car, but the 15-inch wheels [defined by the FIA] means 20kg more on the car.

Nevertheless we managed to keep the weight more or less as it was in generation one.

"I don't want to say it's lighter, but the weight distribution and the constraints we had designing the car, it was not easy to design and develop a car with the same weight. Nevertheless we managed to achieve a car which we believe is faster compared to generation one. I say 'we believe' because Tatuus is not a team – we don't develop cars in terms of performance; it will be the teams' job."

Freddie Slater will go down in history as the last champion of the FRECA Alpine era, thanks to a double win at the Monza season finale.

MARCUS SIMMONS



TATUUS

RACE WINNERS

11 October - 2 November

SUPER FORMULA

Fuji 11-12 October

Race 1 Sacha Fenestraz
(TOM'S)

Race 2 Cancelled

POINTS

1 Sho Tsuboi 104.5;
2 Ayumu Iwasa 90;
3 Kakunoshin Ohta 89.

FORMULA REGIONAL
EUROPEAN

Monza 25-26 October

Races 1 & 2 Freddie Slater
(Prema Racing)

POINTS

1 Slater 313;
2 Matteo De Palo 277;
3 Enzo Deligny 235.



MACAUGP

BOYA LEADS F3 BOYS
ON MACAU RETURN

A number of Formula 3 drivers are making the step down to compete in the second running of the Macau Grand Prix for Formula Regional cars.

Mari Boya, third in the F3 points this term, has returned to Pinnacle Motorsport – his 2024 Macau team (above) – for a third crack at the race prior to the Spaniard's anticipated graduation to Formula 2 for 2026. Noah Stromsted and Tasanapol Inthraphuvasak – sixth and seventh in the F3 standings – both line up with Trident, while Theophile Nael (eighth) partners Boya at Pinnacle.

Meanwhile, Charlie Wurz joins brother Oscar at Evans GP for an event contested by their father Alexander in 1994 and 1995!



Battery EV



Plug-in
hybrid EV

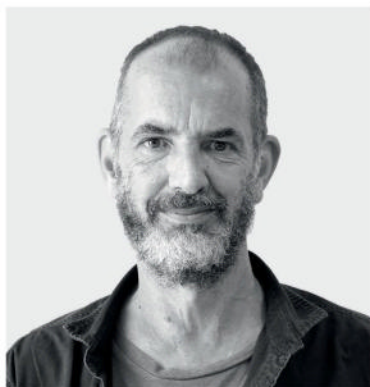
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driving emotion

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INSIDER

The middle ground of single-seater racing is buzzing, reckons Marcus Simmons

These are intriguing times for the intermediate level between Formula 4 and F3. While the Dallara 326 is set to launch a grand new era of old-philosophy 'F3' (see p78), Tatuus has launched its new T-326 Formula Regional car and... guess what, it's using the same engine.

Dallara and Tatuus are two fantastic Italian constructors who between them have pretty much buttoned up the worldwide single-seater market. The competition between them is non-existent; they each know their own markets – Dallara in the upper echelons towards F2, Super Formula and IndyCar, Tatuus in the lower. But rarely has there been a time such as now when the margins in the middle ground are so thin.

The Tatuus T-326, like the Dallara 326, will be powered by the three-cylinder, turbocharged Toyota G16E unit developed in conjunction with the Japanese giant's long-time motorsport partner TOM'S. But, for the Formula Regional car, these will be breathed upon in Italy by Autotecnica Motori (ATM) and dubbed the ATM163T. ATM has a long history with Tatuus. It produced the motors used in the constructor's Formula Abarth cars in the early 2010s and has developed the Abarth power in F4 since 2014. Tatuus and ATM partnered up later that decade and are now two large entities in a new conglomerate known as Korus Group, stretching from junior single-seaters into karting. ATM chief Giovanni Delfino is CEO, with Tatuus co-founder Gianfranco De Bellis as president. Both are terrific guys with racing hearts.

So far so good, but some racing hearts are sad... You see, the move to Toyota power means the 'A' has dropped off 'FRECA', the FIA's Formula Regional European Championship by Alpine. And that means an end to the involvement in this level of racing from the Renault Group after more than half a century.

Formula Renault was born in 1971 as a renaming of the

Renault-powered Formula France, and the Eurocup ran from 1993 until 2021, when it merged with the European FRegional series to become FRECA. It is hard to think of a company that did more for single-seater racing over the decades than Renault Sport, from its early champions including Rene Arnoux, Didier Pironi and Alain Prost to late-era Eurocup title winners Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri. From 1995, when it launched its stunning RC95 for the new 2.0-litre Formula Renault Sport, Tatuus was at the forefront of the class except for 2010-12, when the bizarre decision was made for a dalliance with Barazi Epsilon.

"I think Gianfranco worked at least 30 years with Renault or Alpine," remarks Delfino of De Bellis. "When you enter Tatuus, you still breathe the Formula Renault atmosphere. When Alpine decided to stop with activities other than F1, for us it was a little bit of a surprise. Nevertheless we tried a lot to keep them in the loop, saying, 'OK just give us the engines and ATM will develop them so that we can still say that it's powered by Alpine'. But in the end there was no will from them. At the moment the relationship has been stopped, but maybe in the future it will start again. I hope so. But having Toyota on board is the same."

That's a fair comment. Toyota has also played a huge role in bringing talent to the forefront; for example, junior proteges such as Ryan Briscoe and Kamui Kobayashi won Formula Renault titles in Tatuus machinery. And, with TOM'S, it is taking a firm grip on this level of the sport, including in the Dallara-based championships. In the FRegional world, the Middle East series kicks off in January with the competition debut of the Toyota-powered T-326. And the other two main FRegional series, in New Zealand (which Tatuus also supplies) and Japan, are already aligned with the manufacturer, albeit through more conventional four-cylinder power.

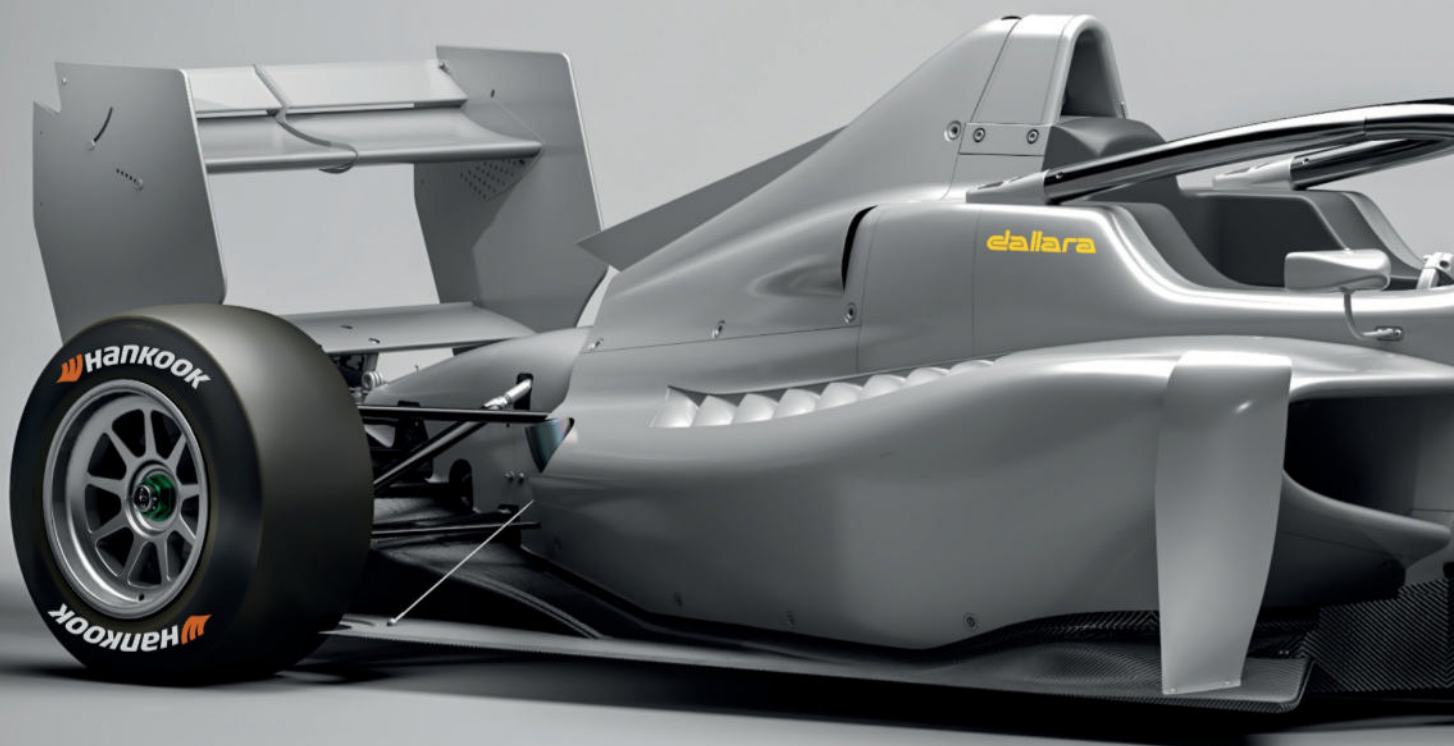
"We have already started to talk with New Zealand for

"The competition between them is non-existent; they each know their own markets"

the new-generation car that they will introduce in 2027," says Delfino. "The engine we have chosen for the second-generation Regional car could link everything. It's also, let's say, the best option for the World Cup in Macau."

As Dallara is to what many of us old traditionalists refer to as 'proper F3', Tatuus is to the FIA's FRegional (as it was to FRenault). "For us, it's an important achievement because we need and we want to work in continuity with the past," declares Delfino. "We were the first to start in 2014 with F4. In 2022 we started with the new generation of F4 and we have 13 championships with the same chassis. Same with the Regional. We started in 2019 with the European championship and then with New Zealand."

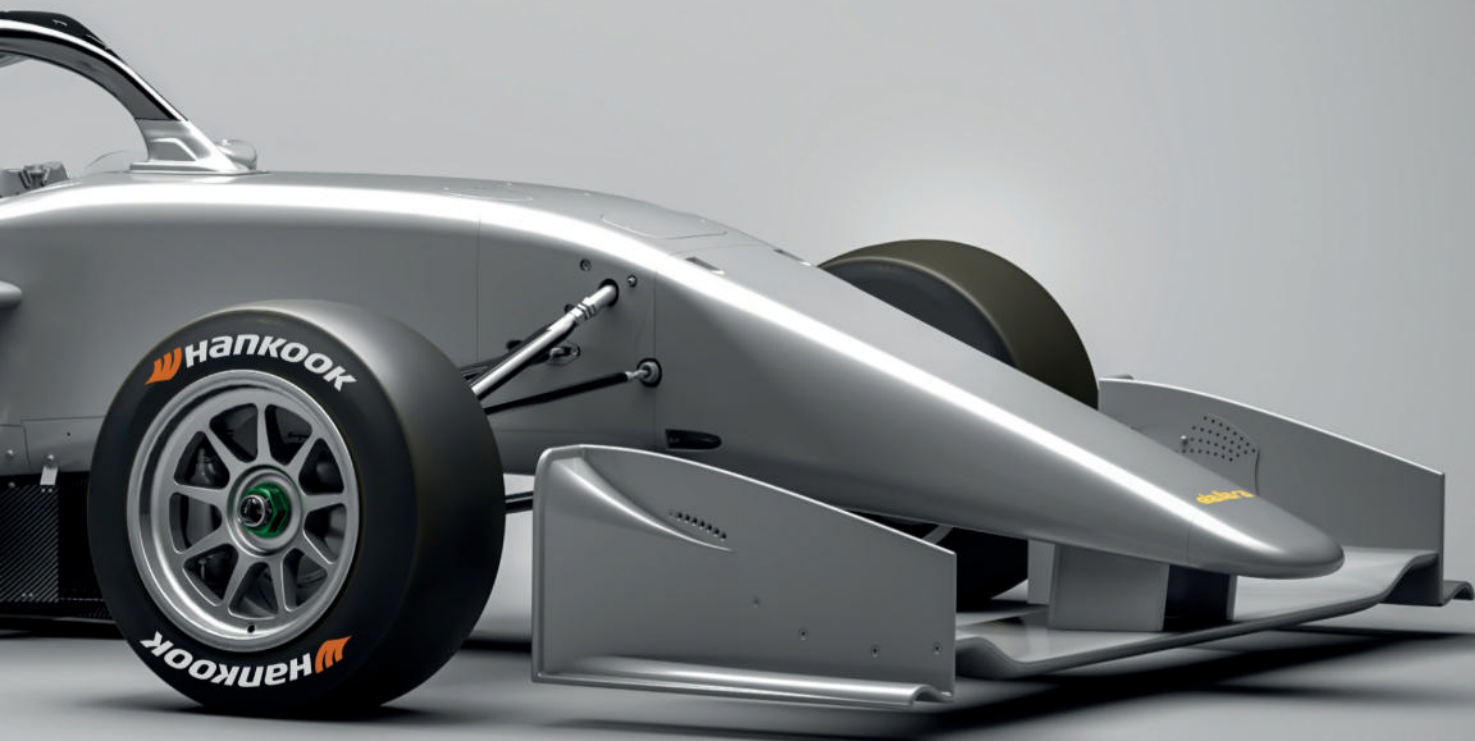
That's plenty to build on and, with Tatuus and its Korus partners, this niche is in safe hands. ✎



THE NEXT SINGLE-SEATER REVOLUTION STARTS HERE

Eurocup-3's predicted expansion as it switches to the Dallara 326 chassis for 2026 promises to revive the spirit of series that sired a generation of F1 stars

MARCUS SIMMONS



M

ax Verstappen. Lando Norris.
George Russell. Charles Leclerc.
Alex Albon. Carlos Sainz. Esteban Ocon.
Lance Stroll. Remember the old FIA

Formula 3 European Championship that ran from 2012-18? It produced all of these current F1 drivers, before it was killed off and 'merged' into what had formerly been known as GP3. F3 traditionalists were heartbroken. But now it's back... to a degree. And it promises to revolutionise single-seater racing in Europe.

Eurocup-3 has not commanded much attention on UK shores, but it has been a success story of the past three years, using a modified version of the same Tatuus chassis found in the Formula Regional European Championship by Alpine (FRECA). For 2026, the series makes the switch to the Dallara 326 – the Italian constructor's 'continuation' car of the old F3 philosophy it so dominated. Fields of 30 cars are expected for a schedule that visits Paul Ricard, the Red Bull Ring, the Algarve Circuit in Portimao, Imola and Monza, Barcelona and the new Mading... and, for the first time, Silverstone in support of the European Le Mans Series.

Powering the cars is the 1.6-litre turbocharged, three-cylinder TGE33 engine produced by Japanese giant TOM'S, and based on the G16E-GTS unit from the Toyota GR Yaris. The beauty is that the concept is already proven: Japan's Super Formula Lights series introduced the TGE33 for 2024, installed in the Dallara 324 – basically exactly the same chassis as the 326. And, closer to home, Euroformula Open (EFO) adopted the same combination this year, its grid rising from single figures to a dozen.

Imagine a whole field of them... And that will be Eurocup-3 in 2026. Its numbers with the Tatuus (powered by the Alfa Romeo turbo) are already in the high twenties; it has teams from the sister Spanish F4 Championship eyeing a step up; and now it is turning away big squads from across Europe. "Last month, three teams say they want to come into the championship,

"We started small, but now we have Red Bull drivers, Ferrari academy, Alpine..."

and for them it's not possible," relates series boss Marco Rodriguez. "One really strong asked me, and I must answer, 'I'm sorry, but we are full!'"

Eurocup-3 and Spanish F4 are built upon what you might call a pillar of socialist principles, whereby the teams collectively own the series. Rodriguez harks back to 2018, when he was running his own squad: Formula de Campeones: "The Spanish federation called us, three teams – Drivex, MP Motorsport and myself. They had a problem with the promoter and asked us to manage the [Spanish F4] championship.

"We started with three teams in Motorland with only eight cars, but we grew the championship. Why? Because we have a system where we put the teams in the middle of the film. Normally, we speak a lot about the drivers,

the team principals, the promoters. We decided that probably the key point of this business is in the teams, especially in this category, because you need to find a lot of drivers, a lot of budget. With this system we help a lot the teams and return them part of the money they invest in the championship."

By 2022, grids were in the mid-thirties, but there were few paths of progression for the leading drivers. FRECA seats were monopolised by graduates from its own 'junior' series, Italian F4, with both series plus top-level karting part of the same ladder thanks to their alignment with karting promoter WSK. "We thought there was a space to have another category because we had a lot of drivers coming from our F4," explains Rodriguez. "We can say FRECA is more or less an Italian championship – all these drivers come from go-karts to Italian F4 and the natural way is Regional. And there's not a lot of good places for our top drivers. We started being a small championship, but now we have Red Bull drivers, Ferrari academy, Alpine – high quality drivers."

Indeed, this year's Eurocup-3 champion, Italo-Argentinian Mattia Colnaghi – arguably the most promising talent to hail from Monza since Vittorio Brambilla – was this summer announced as a new member of the Red Bull Junior programme.

"The first idea we had was to do it with Dallara, but in the end for various reasons in that moment it was not possible," continues Rodriguez. "We spoke with Tatuus and they told us, 'Yes, with the same chassis as the Regional car, and we can do different aero for you if you want'. In this case we were really lucky because we didn't have enough time to develop the car. We knew that with the teams we had we could start with 16 cars, and with the same system to make as low a price as possible to help the teams as much as possible."

Dallara's Jos Claes, the long-time project leader on the company's F3 models, explains: "We could not install the engine that was chosen inside the car, and time was short, so it didn't happen then. I stayed in contact with some teams and some people in the championship, and once in a while we talked, but they were also looking forward into their next new car, until a certain point when they decided, 'Let's talk to Dallara again'.

"We sat around the table again and I immediately understood that this was a golden opportunity for us, to have a third championship using this car, which is just an alternative to other things existing on the market – we don't want to pretend anything else. It's the car that we love. It's a free market and these people had the courage to choose a car that costs more when you buy it, but you get a certain product, and the teams and drivers want to have it, want to drive it."

Claes is very much echoed by his old pal, Double R Racing chief Anthony 'Boyo' Hieatt. His team has been tempted back into competition – after a sabbatical of a few seasons – in Eurocup-3. And it's not the only British team that will be in the paddock: single-seater giant Hitech GP is another to take the plunge.

With its four Dallara 320s (the forerunner to the 324 and 326), Hieatt estimates "we've done in excess of 300,000 kilometres" of testing programmes. "We're ➤



Eurocup-3 does not see itself in competition with Euroformula Open...

FOTOSPEEDY



Series boss Rodriguez has had to turn away big teams from next season's roster

EURO CUP-3



...or Japan's Super Formula Lights, although they share basically the same car

SUPERFORMULA LIGHTS



Red Bull Junior programme signed up 2025 Eurocup-3 champion Colnaghi

DUTCH PHOTO AGENCY / RED BULL CONTENT POOL



Russell's former F3 squad
Hitech GP (this is 2016) is
on board for Eurocup-3...

KREMER/PIXOLLI STUDIOS/GETTY IMAGES



...as is Double R – here
taking Mike Conway
to 2006 Macau glory

GRIFFITHS/LAT/GETTY IMAGES



Superlicence points
upgrade is reckoned to be
in the pipeline for Eurocup-3

EUROcup-3



Double R chief and self-confessed F3
stalwart Hieatt (third from left) helps lift
2001 British champ Takuma Sato aloft

SPINNEY/LAT/GETTY IMAGES

busier on the circuit than we've ever been before," he adds. "Last year we did 120 days with the 320 and our Tatuus F4 cars, training a lot of drivers for other teams. I'm a stalwart of F3 and the Dallara is a fantastically engineered car. And the way that championship is run by the teams, for the teams is a refreshing model."

Double R and Hitech aren't the only Eurocup-3 newcomers. Spanish F4 stalwart Tecnicar plus TC Racing (owned by Real Madrid and Belgium goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois) are making the step up. And they will join the incumbent Campos Racing, MP Motorsport, Palou Motorsport (founded by IndyCar champion Alex Palou and his father Ramon), Drivex and GRS Team. Teams are limited to four cars, although, chuckles Rodriguez,

"The F1 teams and WEC appreciate the work these guys have done in 'real' F3"

"Campos pushed me a lot to have five, six or seven".

Dallara therefore has a lot of work on its hands, producing new 326s in batches of 10 for delivery through December, January and February in time for the pre-season Winter Series in Portimao, Jarama and Motorland Aragon. "Our first race is in February," says Rodriguez. "But when you work with a serious company like Dallara they protect you a bit. We are receiving all the engines, we are in the middle of work with looms, we have clutches, gearboxes. We have more or less everything prepared."

And, says Claes, the relationship is good from his side. "Honestly, we didn't discuss much on the contract," reckons the Belgian. "I visited Spain a few times, talks over the phone, we discussed only three or four minor items, we signed the contract and we went for it. I was confident. I said inside Dallara, 'They signed for 30 cars, we will sell 30 cars'. It was the right timing. It's a great concept of championship and it is, as people say, *en vogue*. They go to the right tracks. They don't do anything wrong; they do many things very right. And so I strongly believe in it, and I pushed the company of course: 'We must be in here, we must do it.'"

But Rodriguez, a veteran of the single-seater scene throughout this century, knows there is no room for complacency. "One of the things that I always say to my colleagues and the shareholders within the company is, 'Be careful, we can't sleep,'" he warns. "If someone asked you in 2005 or 2006, you would say, 'For sure, the World Series by Renault is for life'. When I was young, speaking in terms of British Formula 3, you'd say that was the maximum you can imagine. You never hear me say we are the best."

One thing Eurocup-3 will never be best at regards the allocation of FIA F1 superlicence points, simply because it is outside the governing body's approved ladder. While FRECA basks in the glow of 25 points for its champion, there is talk behind the scenes of an upgrade for Eurocup-3. Rodriguez can't say anything yet, but expect a minimum 15, which is

at least progress and comparable with GB3.

That should make it more attractive to prospective drivers. "You need to have a step between F4 and FIA F3 – the jump is just too big," reasons Infinity Sports Management's Gary Catt, who confirmed that his company will have a driver in Eurocup-3. "It looks like it will be a decent alternative – it could potentially be one of the bigger ones."

Infinity, which Catt helms alongside Harry Soden, passed its initial protege Harry Tincknell through the old British and European F3, and its big star George Russell is, as already described, another alumnus of the category. "You look at all the drivers who get back in and test the Euroformula car – they all love it," affirms Catt. "A lot of F1 drivers test it in the winter to stay sharp."

Most of them are with Double R, Hieatt chortling, "I can't name any names, but we've done a significant amount of F1 drivers, F2, F3, IndyCar, Indy NXT. In this category, with this car, as it has done for the past 60 years it produces fabulous race car drivers. Testing is a little more open, and they get the opportunity to hone their skills. The F1 teams and World Endurance Championship [in which Double R carries out logistics and spare parts for Dallara's Le Mans Hypercar customers BMW and Cadillac] appreciate the work these guys have done in 'real' F3. Every lap in these cars is a push-lap, and that hones these drivers' precision and repeatability."

And the lap times are impressive: at the final EFO round at Monza, using effectively the same car as the Eurocup-3 Dallara 326, the fastest qualifying lap was 1m41.842s; at the same meeting, GB3 was 1m43.406s; the following weekend, FRECA was 1m44.172s.

But Eurocup-3 does not see itself in competition with any of these series, more prising open a new marketplace. That's surprising considering EFO is near-identical. "If someone is attracted by FRECA for example, fine, let them go to R-ace or Prema or whoever," declares Claes. "And someone else will say, 'I like this calendar, I like this car and I go here'."

"EFO is a long-lasting successful championship and well-organised. It has gone through a few successful years and then it went through its worst dip, and clearly it's climbing out of it. They are ordering more cars, just as Japan are. The fact that Eurocup-3 joins the club of this car will be beneficial I think for all the championships. I believe the three championships will profit from the fact that they choose the same car, engine, electronics, just the tyres different [with Eurocup-3 using Hankook, just as did the old European F3]."

"The system of this promotion company is completely different," argues Rodriguez. "I'm the CEO but I'm not the owner. The owners are the teams. That is why 70 to 80% returns directly or indirectly to the championship, and why we can't compare to other championships. We don't have any problems with EFO, Regional, GB3."

And who's to say that Eurocup-3 can't collaborate in future with EFO and Super Formula Lights to form the grid for the Macau Grand Prix, once its current Regional era is over? That really would be like a return to the old F3... 🌟



Acura's title challenge fades

The IMSA SportsCar Championship climaxed in the nighttime at Road Atlanta in October with the 28th running of the Petit Le Mans endurance. Acura went into the race with a realistic chance of beating Porsche to the manufacturers' title, but it didn't dazzle. The #93

Meyer Shank Racing ARX-06 LMDh shared by Renger van der Zande, Nick Yelloly and Tristan Vautier and run in conjunction with the Honda Racing Corporation USA came home seventh, a lap down on the winning Action Express Racing Cadillac. The Tom Blomqvist/

Colin Braun/Scott Dixon #60 MSR entry took the pole but only finished two places higher after an undisclosed technical problem blunted its performance over the second half of the 10-hour race. Turn the page for our race debrief.



Photographer Michael L Levitt/
Lumen/Getty Images

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6.0s @ F25



Caddy crew of Aitken, Bamber and Vesti celebrate victory in 10-hour IMSA season finale

LEVITT/LUMEN

IMSA SPORTSCAR CHAMPIONSHIP

CADILLAC CLAIMS PETIT AS CAUTIOUS PORSCHE WINS BIG

Porsche and Penske took a clean sweep of the end-of-season GTP silverware on offer after 10 hours of racing at the Petit Le Mans IMSA SportsCar Championship finale. It retained its drivers', teams' and manufacturers' crowns in the regular points and did likewise in the Endurance Cup. To say it was a walk in the park might be overegging it. Yet walking was an essential part of the story in Matt Campbell's and Mathieu Jaminet's journey to the drivers' crown.

The Road Atlanta classic in October attracted a record crowd – up by a whopping 20%, said circuit owner NASCAR, though it never puts figures on race attendances – with a resultant increase in race day traffic. That almost caught out the Penske Porsche Motorsport squad. A journey that good friends Campbell and Jaminet were expecting to take half an hour turned into a marathon of an hour and 40 minutes.

That explains why nominated starting driver Campbell decided to get out and walk the final couple of miles to ensure he was in situ in time for the reconnaissance laps an hour and a half before the green flag. It set the tone for the #6 963 LMDh's race. If there wasn't a championship at stake, the two Matts might have closed their season in style with a victory together with

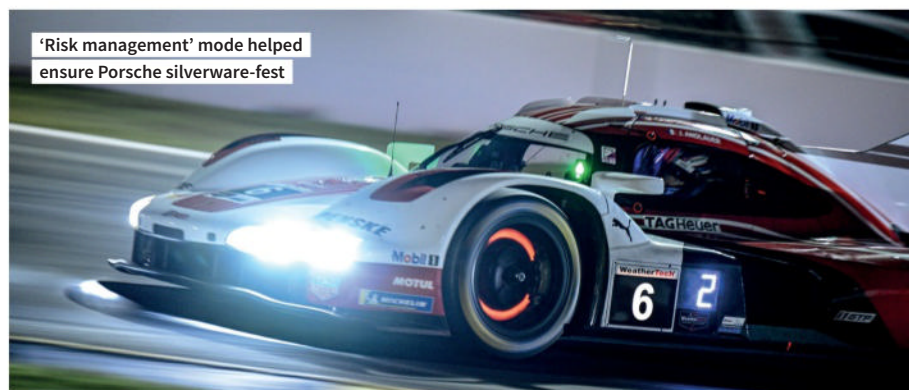
third driver Laurens Vanthoor.

"One hour before I was due on track for the reconnaissance laps I thought I'd get out and walk just to be safe," said Campbell. "I didn't want to be in too much of a rush – and it did get the legs working."

A traffic jam wasn't the only problem for PPM on race morning. Julien Andlauer, who was due to share with Campbell and Jaminet, fell ill. Straight away fellow World Endurance Championship driver Vanthoor offered to pull double duty across the team's two cars. There was a bit of maths to do as PPM juggled getting the Belgian through the minimum drive time in each Porsche, but it was no more than a hiccup.

Fast forward to the end of the race, and the #6 PPM entry with Campbell at the wheel looked like a genuine contender for victory in an event Porsche has never won outright with a prototype – its solo victory over the previous 27 editions came when Nick Tandy and Patrick Pilet triumphed in horrendous rain at the wheel of a GT Le Mans-class Porsche 911 RSR. But with all those trophies more or less in the bag for Porsche, he decided that discretion was the better part of valour.

The championship-winning Porsche had jumped to the front of the classification late in the third hour despite not having the pace of the frontrunners early on. It owed its position at the



'Risk management' mode helped ensure Porsche silverware-fest

BADRAOUJ/LUMEN

GRIFIN/CONSPORTSWEIRE



Valkyrie built on recent promise with second place – its best IMSA/WEC finish so far

BADRAOU/LUMEN



Grosjean showed fine pace as Lambo was properly in the mix during likely last hurrah

top of the order to the timing of the pit call for Jaminet to take over from Campbell. The fifth of the six safety cars to punctuate the race was called as the 963 entered the pitlane, winning it time over those that stopped before and after.

Over the remainder of the race, the Porsche would remain a genuine contender: it led pretty much all the way to the final caution period with four hours left on the clock and was right in the mix thereafter. “We knew our car would come alive a bit more in the night,” said Campbell.

That was never more so than when he climbed aboard. The Porsche came back at the Action Express Racing Cadillac V-Series.R LMDh that was leading the race in Earl Bamber’s hands over the course of the penultimate hour. Four seconds quickly became less than one, but Campbell played it safe, just as he had before the race. “I think the win was possible, but we were in a risk management situation,” he said.

Jaminet continued Campbell’s percentage play after taking over for the final hour: he let the Caddy, which Bamber shared with Jack Aitken and Frederik Vesti, go and was jumped on strategy by The Heart of Racing Aston Martin Valkyrie Le Mans Hypercar in which WEC regular Alex Riberas again joined IMSA regulars Ross Gunn and Roman De Angelis.

The final full pitstops for the GTP frontrunners took place with an hour to go, which ensured everyone would require a late splash if the race stayed green. THOR opted to bring De Angelis in early, the tactic working a treat. After the

Caddy and the Porsche made their stops, he was suddenly third behind Bamber and a car that had taken the opposite strategy: Romain Grosjean ran second in the factory Lamborghini SC63 LMDh until he ducked in for his splash of fuel with five minutes remaining.

De Angelis was just three seconds behind the leader at this point and remained so until backing off on the final lap to finish 5.2s in arrears. Second was still by far the best result so far for the Valkyrie in either IMSA or WEC, THOR building on the promise of its showings in the past two world championship rounds at Austin and Fuji where, with a bit of luck, it might have made the podium.

There was little between the top four cars over the four hours of uninterrupted green flag running. The Lambo, running revised rear suspension introduced at the Indianapolis 6 Hours in September, was genuinely fast, at least when Grosjean was at the wheel, less so when Edoardo Mortara and Daniil Kvyat were driving. The shame is that it was almost certainly the last hurrah for a project that is now officially on hold.

Victory at the 28th running of Petit could have gone any number of ways, but the Action Express Caddy was a worthy winner. It was the fastest car over the duration of the race. And, but for a puncture just before the first cut-off for Endurance Cup points, would have deprived Porsche of a couple of trophies, percentage play by PPM or not.

GARY WATKINS

RESULTS ROUND 11/11

GTP/OVERALL

- Jack Aitken/Earl Bamber
Frederik Vesti**
Cadillac V-Series.R
(Action Express Racing)
436 laps in 10h00m37.101s
Grid 2nd (1m09.827s)
- Ross Gunn/Roman De Angelis/
Alex Riberas**
Aston Martin Valkyrie
(Aston Martin THOR Team)
+5.182s
Grid 5th (1m10.254s)
- Mathieu Jaminet/Matt Campbell/
Laurens Vanthoor**
Porsche 963
(Porsche Penske Motorsport)
+12.745s
Grid 6th (1m10.284s)
- Romain Grosjean/Edoardo
Mortara/Daniil Kvyat**
Lamborghini SC63
(Lamborghini Squadra Corse)
+34.428s
Grid 7th (1m10.309s)
- Tom Blomqvist/Colin Braun/
Scott Dixon**
Acura ARX-06
(Meyer Shank Racing with
Curb-Agajanian)
+41.116s
Grid 1st (1m09.628s)

LMP2

- Steven Thomas/Mikkel Jensen/
Hunter McElrea**
ORECA-Gibson 07
(TDS Racing)
426 laps in 10h00m41.447s
Grid 12th (no time)

GTD PRO

- Max Hesse/Dan Harper/
Connor De Phillippi**
BMW M4 GT3 Evo
(Paul Miller Racing)
406 laps in 10h01m41.957s
Grid 1st (1m18.523s)

GTD

- Simon Mann/Lilou Wadoux/
Alessandro Pier Guidi**
Ferrari 296 GT3
(AF Corse)
405 laps in 10h00m59.861s
Grid 4th (1m18.821s)

Pole Blomqvist 1m09.628s (131.33mph)

Fastest lap Vesti 1m12.276s (126.52mph)

GTP POINTS 1 Jaminet/Campbell 2907;
2 Aitken 2720; 3 Felipe Nasr/Nick Tandy
2689.



Exit from Porsche has freed Portuguese up for Hypercar seat

PORSCHE

WEC

DA COSTA GETS WEC RETURN WITH ALPINE DEAL FOR 2026

Antonio Felix da Costa has stuck to his promise to return to the World Endurance Championship, with the 2022 WEC LMP2 title winner racing for Alpine in the Hypercar class next season.

The Portuguese was forced to bow out of the series at the end of the 2023 season, which he contested in the Jota team's privateer Porsche 963 LMDh, at the behest of the German manufacturer. It wanted him to focus on his Formula E campaign with its factory team, and in the two years since he has raced only once in WEC: a Le Mans 24 Hours appearance in LMP2 in 2025. But his departure from Porsche and signing for Jaguar in FE has facilitated the Alpine deal.

A WEC return was "one of my main objectives", according to da Costa. "I am extremely pleased to do so with a manufacturer that has been redefining itself in a bold and ambitious way," he said. "The team has been performing at a very high level, recently scoring its maiden victory with the A424 [at Fuji in September], making this the perfect moment

to begin our collaboration."

The arrival of da Costa is the latest piece in the jigsaw of what will be a revised line-up at the Signatech-run Alpine team. Frederic Makowiecki and Jules Gounon, who joined the team's full-season line-up this year, will continue, as will Charles Milesi, who is known to have signed an extension to his deal.

Meanwhile, James Calado will remain a Ferrari driver next year. He became the fifth of the six members of its factory Hypercar squad to extend his contract into 2026 late in October, though in keeping with Ferrari practice his programme for the forthcoming season was not confirmed on the announcement.

Antonio Giovinazzi and Nicklas Nielsen re-signed this year, while Antonio Fuoco and Miguel Molina put pen to paper on what are believed to have been two-year contracts at the end of 2024. That leaves marque stalwart Alessandro Pier Guidi, whose last renewal was announced in January 2024.

GARY WATKINS

WEC

GARAGE 59 STEPS IN AS UNITED PINS FOCUS ON MCLAREN LMDH

United Autosports will not be represented in the full World Endurance Championship next year for the first time since joining the series in 2019-20. It has made the withdrawal as McLaren's representative in the LMGT3 class to focus on preparations for its entry into the championship's Hypercar division with the British manufacturer in 2027 and will be replaced by Garage 59.

"It is truly an honour to race in the WEC, so this is not a decision we have taken lightly," said United team principal Richard Dean. "But when you have the opportunity to race in Hypercar and form a team with McLaren Racing with the goal to compete for outright victory in the championship, including the Le Mans 24 Hours – something we have worked for, fought for, dreamed of for years – we are going to be doing everything in our power to make it a success."

The LMGT3 exit is a prelude to the commencement of testing, set for next spring, of the new McLaren LMDh developed around the Dallara chassis spine.

Garage 59 has been chosen by McLaren to take over its WEC entry of a pair of 720S GT3 Evos, pending approval by series organisers the FIA and the Automobile Club de l'Ouest. It was one of the teams in the frame for the McLaren deal ahead of the 2024 season before it went to United, which is co-owned by Dean and McLaren Racing boss Zak Brown.

Garage 59, which in a former iteration masterminded the development and build of the McLaren MP4-12C and 650S GT3 contenders, is expanding from running the 720S in the GT World Challenge Europe, where it has flown the McLaren flag since 2022, and International GT Open, which it joined with the 720S this year. It has confirmed that it will run tandem campaigns in the WEC and in Europe next year.

It signed off on its 2025 GTWCE campaign with an overall victory at the Barcelona Endurance Cup round in October for its Gold Cup class crew of Brits Dean Macdonald and Adam Smalley together with Louis Prette.

GARY WATKINS



Smalley, Macdonald and Prette won GTWCE finale with Garage 59 McLaren

SRO/JEP



WEC

HANDICAPS LOOM FOR HYPERCARS

The prospect of an introduction of success handicaps hangs over the World Endurance Championship's Hypercar class for next year. Provision has been left in the 2026 sporting rules for the measure.

But the FIA and the Automobile Club de l'Ouest, which jointly run the WEC, are stressing that for the moment no decision has been made to extend the reach of success handicaps from the LMGT3 class. As in the secondary division, the handicaps would not be in place for the blue-riband Le Mans 24 Hours round of the championship.

"As per the 2026 WEC sporting regulations, the success handicap, already in place in the LMGT3 class in previous years, may also be applied in the Hypercar class, if deemed necessary by WEC's regulatory bodies before the start of the season," a statement read. "No decision has been made at this stage, and the provision has been introduced only to allow the possibility of inclusion of such an adjustment as part of the performance balancing process in 2026."

The idea of success handicaps, which were part of the top WEC class, then LMP1, for the 2019-20 season, follows disquiet among the manufacturers over the Balance of Performance this season. It is known to have been a point of discussion when they met in Paris at the end of September for a discussion about the

future direction of the Hypercar rules.

"The 2026 performance balancing process is being developed with full transparency and in close collaboration with the manufacturers," the statement, which came via the FIA, went on. "The exact details of the performance balancing process will be determined before the first timed session of the Prologue, the official pre-season test, which is set to take place at Lusail International Circuit one week before the 2026 season-opening Qatar 1812Km [in March]."

The FIA and the ACO are working to again revise the BoP process for 2026 on the back of establishing what have been described as "more robust performance parameters" under the homologation process of the Le Mans Hypercar and LMDh machinery that race together in Hypercar. This will follow a new round of wind tunnel testing at the Windshear facility in the US. Previously only LMDh machinery had gone into the Windshear tunnel, but now the LMH is following because the Sauber tunnel where they were formerly tested is no longer available after Audi's takeover of the Formula 1 team.

A new clause, meanwhile, has been added to the technical regulations governing evo joker performance upgrades. They will be "based on performance deficiency only determined by [the] governing body", which effectively represents a firming up of the current situation in which manufacturers have to get updates signed off by the FIA/ACO.

GARY WATKINS

➔ P91 OPINION

RACE WINNERS 11 October - 2 November

EUROPEAN LE MANS SERIES

Algarve Circuit 18 October

Charles Milesi/Esteban Masson/Oliver Gray (VDS Panis Racing ORECA 07)

POINTS 1 Milesi/Masson/Gray 106; 2 Nick Yelloly/Tom Dillmann/Jakub Smiechowski 92; 3 Daniel Juncadella/Mathys Jaubert/Jamie Chadwick 90.

GTWC EUROPE ENDURANCE CUP

Barcelona 12 October

Dean Macdonald/Adam Smalley/Louis Prette Jr (Garage 59 McLaren 720S GT3 Evo)

POINTS 1 Alessio Picariello/Sven Muller/Patric Niederhauser 73; 2 Lucas Auer/Maro Engel/Matteo Cairoli 72; 3 Kelvin van der Linde/Charles Weerts/Ugo de Wilde 63.

INTERCONTINENTAL GT CHALLENGE

Indianapolis 8 Hours 18 October

Kelvin van der Linde/Charles Weerts/Valentino Rossi (below)
(Team WRT BMW M4 GT3 Evo)

POINTS 1 van der Linde 110; 2 Raffaele Marciello 95; 3 Augusto Farfus 87.

SUPER GT

Autopolis 19 October

Naoki Yamamoto/Tadasuke Makino
(Team Kunimitsu Honda Civic Type R-GT)

Motegi 2 November

Kenta Yamashita/Sho Tsuboi
(TOM'S Toyota GR Supra GT500)

POINTS 1 Yamashita/Tsuboi 80.5; 2 Tadasuke Makino/Naoki Yamamoto 63; 3 Toshiki Oyu/Hiroaki Ishiura 56.



MASTERING ENERGY



Today we pause to celebrate
our first 50 years in motorsports.
Tomorrow, we set course
for many more to come.





INSIDER

*Say no to success ballast,
argues Gary Watkins*

So, success handicaps could be part of the landscape in the Hypercar class of the World Endurance Championship next year. Everyone wants close racing right at the front of the world's top sportscar series, and that's something we haven't always seen this year. But is pegging back cars based on their results the right way of going about it? Absolutely not, I would say.

Why the FIA and the Automobile Club de l'Ouest, which jointly run the WEC, are looking at handicaps isn't entirely clear at this stage. The failure to get the Balance of Performance right this year has to be a factor, or rather the criticism they have received for their travails in that department. That probably explains why when there was a proposal to do away with the BoP, the idea gained some traction in some quarters among the powers that be.

The thought of getting rid of the BoP was kicked into touch courtesy of universal opposition from all the manufacturers save for the one that proposed it, which we can safely say was Ferrari. Are success handicaps the next bus along? Certainly they are being considered as an adjunct to the BoP, whatever form that takes next season. But my problem is that success handicaps – the modern-day successor of success ballast – stand diametrically opposed to the principles of the BoP in Hypercar. Or at least how they have been explained to me.

The BoP is meant to level the playing field to such an extent that the battle for victory comes down to the performance of the drivers, strategy, reliability and the like. 'Execution' is the modern buzz word. So a manufacturer, team and car crew does the business in all those departments, wins a race and gets slowed for the next race. That represents a significant change in philosophy, I'd say.

The FIA and the ACO, along with the Hypercar manufacturers, need to heed the lessons of history. That's wider motorsport history and the WEC's past. Think back to

the All Japan GT Championship (now Super GT) at the start of the century and its draconian system of weight penalties. Three years out of four from 2000-03, the champion or champions didn't win a race. Ensuring the ballast stayed off was the name of the game in the battle for the title.

Success handicaps, initially in their old-school form of simple ballast, have been with us for some time in the pro-am GT class – GTE Am – up to the end of 2023 and now LMGT3. It is probably a good way of balancing out the bronze-rated amateurs. That's where the big discrepancies are in driver performance. You should be able to find a 100 platinums and golds who can lap within a tenth of each other, as many silvers who'll be within perhaps two tenths.

There's no need to replicate that in an all-pro class such as Hypercar that boasts some of the best drivers in the world. Nor should we forget that the 2019-20 WEC, the COVID-interrupted, faltering last season of LMP1, faltered that little bit more thanks to a system of handicaps. It was meant to increase the spectacle, to keep it all close, but ended up doing the complete opposite.

We don't know how a system for 2026 might end up working, but back in 2019-20 it didn't. Work, that is. It gave Rebellion Racing a couple of victories, pretty much win-as-you-please affairs rather than the close-run scraps intended. More pertinently it destroyed the championship battle between the two cars from Toyota, the last manufacturer standing in LMP1 after the withdrawal of Audi and then Porsche.

One problem was the extent of the time handicap. The coefficient was increased by more than 50% between the announcement and first application at the Fuji round in October 2019. (I'm not going to go into detail here because, frankly, there isn't the space.) I always got the impression that the FIA and the ACO panicked as they sought to follow up on a promise to ensure the P1 privateers had a chance.

"The upshot was that one Toyota had a significant advantage over the other at any given race"

The upshot was that it meant that one Toyota had a significant advantage over the other at any given race. And it turned out that the #7 driven by Kamui Kobayashi, Mike Conway and Jose Maria Lopez had the lesser handicap in comparison with #8 shared by Sebastien Buemi, Kazuki Nakajima and Brendon Hartley at the longer races when points and a half were up for grabs. Had regular points been on offer at those races, the championship would have gone the other way.

If we do end up with a system of success handicaps next year, they won't be in place for the Le Mans 24 Hours, just as they weren't for the 2020 edition. The ACO has always suggested that its race is far too important to tarnish with success ballast, handicaps or whatever. My argument is that so too is the WEC. ✎

A PORSCHE CHAMPION'S UNUSUAL ROUTE TO THE TOP

Recently crowned IMSA title winner Matt Campbell has proved there's more than one way to make it as a sportscar star

GARY WATKINS

Porsche has had a phenomenal season in the IMSA SportsCar Championship by any standards. And not just because it swept up all six titles across the regular GTP class championship and the parallel

Endurance Cup with the 963 LMDh, as well as claiming victory at the big ones: the Daytona 24 Hours and Sebring 12 Hours. The successes for Porsche Penske Motorsport also provided further validation of the German manufacturer's racing pyramid. Championship winners Matt Campbell and Mathieu Jaminet are very much products of it.

Campbell, in particular, has had an unusual route to the pinnacle of endurance racing. There was no karting for him in his native Australia, no international single-seaters, just an understanding that if he was going to make it as a professional racing driver there was a clear path offered by Porsche in the way that there wasn't in Aussie Supercars, another option considered.

After three years in Formula Ford 1600 in his homeland, he entered the Porsche GT3 Cup Challenge Australia, effectively a class B of its Carrera Cup series using the previous-generation one-make racer. That was in 2014, when he'd just hit 19 and Porsche had returned to the top flight of international sportscar racing with the 919 Hybrid LMP1 in the World Endurance Championship. Racing that car or one of its successors was a clear target.

"Single-seaters were never an option," explains the 30-year-old. "I'd grown up watching IndyCar, so if I had gone that route it would have been in America. But I knew from an early age that it wasn't reachable financially. The Porsche pyramid provides opportunities if you are doing well. At 19 years of age my career path kind of set itself out."

His Cup Challenge campaign with McElrea Racing was a hand-to-mouth affair funded by Campbell's family and some sponsorship. "That was a race-by-race situation," he explains. "It was a bit of a mixture in terms of funding – there were a lot of names on the car." For a graduation to Carrera Cup proper, Campbell and his family came up with a novel idea: investors in Matt Campbell Racing bought shares in him and his career.

"It was the only way we could see to get the budget to keep racing," says Campbell. "Each unit – let's call them shares – had the same value, and some people owned just one, some multiple units. It was important to have the right people involved: we didn't want people who were always asking when they were going to get a return on their investment. If it wasn't for those people, I wouldn't be here today."

This funding structure paid for two years of Carrera Cup at home, which concluded with championship success with McElrea in 2016 and, prior to the end of the series, a nomination from Porsche in Australia to take part in the Porsche junior shootout at the Lausitzring. He got a junior deal that came with a contribution of €200,000 (then about >>



PORSCHE



PORSCHE

Laguna victory a turning point that also kicked off a consistent points-scoring run



Campbell and Jaminet, aka 'CamJam', are buddies who know how each other works

LEVITT/LUNEN/GETTY IMAGES



Funding model of investors in Campbell's career paid for early Porsche success

EDGE PHOTOGRAPHICS/LAT/GETTY IMAGES



GTE Am win in 2018
Le Mans 24 Hours with Dempsey-Proton Racing



Campbell's late move to take 2019 Bathurst 12H win made his name

TRIENTZ/LAT/GETTY IMAGES; ROSENBLUM/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES



2022 title-winning season alongside Jaminet started with Daytona class victory



Overall Le Mans victory is still on the bucket list after falling 14s short this year

FACCHIN/ALESSIOMORGESE/NURPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES

£170,000) towards a budget to race in the Porsche Supercup in 2017. The investors in Campbell provided the rest.

He finished third in the Supercup at his first attempt with the Fach Auto Tech squad in 2017 and moved up to the next rung on the Porsche ladder as what it terms a 'young professional' for the next two years. The primary programme in those two seasons was in the WEC, driving in GTE Am for Dempsey-Proton Racing. It yielded a debut victory in class at Le Mans in the first of the two editions of the race on the 2018-19 'superseason' schedule.

But it was another victory in a prestigious sportscar endurance that was key in propelling Campbell to the hallowed ground of factory driver status. He sealed Porsche's maiden victory in the Bathurst 12 Hour in 2019, squeezing the Earl Bamber Motorsport 911 GT3-R he shared with Dirk Werner and Dennis Olsen into the lead at the Forrest's Elbow tight left-hander with just 10 or so minutes on the clock.

"As a young professional, having a decisive move and a victory at a race Porsche had never won was a turning point as well as a big tick for my career," he recalls. "It was where I started to put my name on the map."

In his first two years as a factory driver, Campbell raced all over. As well as another WEC campaign with Dempsey-Proton, he competed in IMSA with multiple teams, likewise in the Intercontinental GT Challenge. Three of his six IMSA appearances in 2021 at the wheel of a Proton-run WeatherTech Porsche in GTD came alongside Jaminet. They would be paired together in the new GT Daytona Pro class at Pfaff Motorsports in 2022.

They ended up winning the title with the Canadian operation after kicking off the season with a Daytona victory. Two drivers whose careers had more or less mirrored each other's – they became factory drivers at the same time – were already firm friends. The Pfaff campaign was a lead-in to a move up to the prototype ranks with the 963 in IMSA in 2023: Campbell explains that he already knew he would be part of that programme during 2021.

Campbell was moved over to the WEC for 2024, though he turned out for PPM in three of the IMSA enduros, winning overall at Daytona with Felipe Nasr, Dane Cameron and Josef Newgarden. He may not have been on the full-time roster, but he played a crucial role: only he and Nasr drove the winning 963 for the final seven and a bit hours.

It was back to IMSA full time for this season and a resumption of the Campbell and Jaminet pairing, 'CamJam' some have dubbed it. Their strong relationship was crucial in the championship success this year, reckons Campbell. "We are good mates and know how each other works," he explains. "We push and pull each other in the right way. Coming back together this year has been really refreshing."

Campbell reckons they "hit the ground running" at Daytona: victory went to the sister car shared by Nasr, Nick Tandy and Laurens Vanthoor as much as anything else because Campbell, Jaminet and Kevin Estre were on the wrong end of a call by PPM to split its strategies at the final

pitstops. After second places at Sebring and Long Beach, the CamJam car won at Laguna Seca in May, and kept up the scoring better than the sister machine.

"Laguna was the real turning point, and not only because we won," outlines Campbell. "After that we were scoring points consistently. Even with some of the Balance of Performance changes, I felt that we were punching above our weight a little bit."

Campbell now has an overall title in one of the two big sportscar championships in the world to go with an outright Daytona victory, another one in class, two Bathurst wins and a gold medal in the FIA Motorsport Games in the GT Sprint event. Like team-mate Tandy he has achieved it all with an unusual back story: the Brit started out racing Ministox on short ovals at the age of 11, and Campbell began by sprinting a Datsun 1200 coupe aged 14.

It was only natural for him to want to compete. He grew up around racing: his family was heavily involved in the car club that ran his local circuit, the Morgan Park Raceway in Queensland. "My grandfather was president, my aunty was treasurer, my grandmother helped on the food stall, my mother was in timing," he recalls. "I grew up at the track and wanted to get involved as early as possible."

That came with the Datsun known as 'Daisy'.

"I loved the shape of those cars and fortunately they were cheap," says Campbell. "I was doing sprints, time-trial stuff, and then my grandfather decided I better get some coaching. I met Paul Stokell [sometime Aussie V8s

driver] and he said I needed to get in a Formula Ford."

Campbell first raced a Van Diemen before switching to a Spectrum when he moved up to the national series. But he also broadened his experience in a variety of historic machines. They included Daisy and an Australian rules Formula 2 ASP powered by a 1.6-litre Ford pushrod engine, a car he now owns. Later on, he got the chance to race a 1980 Fittipaldi-Cosworth F8 Formula 1 car at the Gulf Historic GP Revival at the Dubai Autodrome in 2022.

"People would ask me to come and drive their cars," Campbell remembers. "It was very important in my career development because I didn't do karts. It helped me understand that different cars need different things."

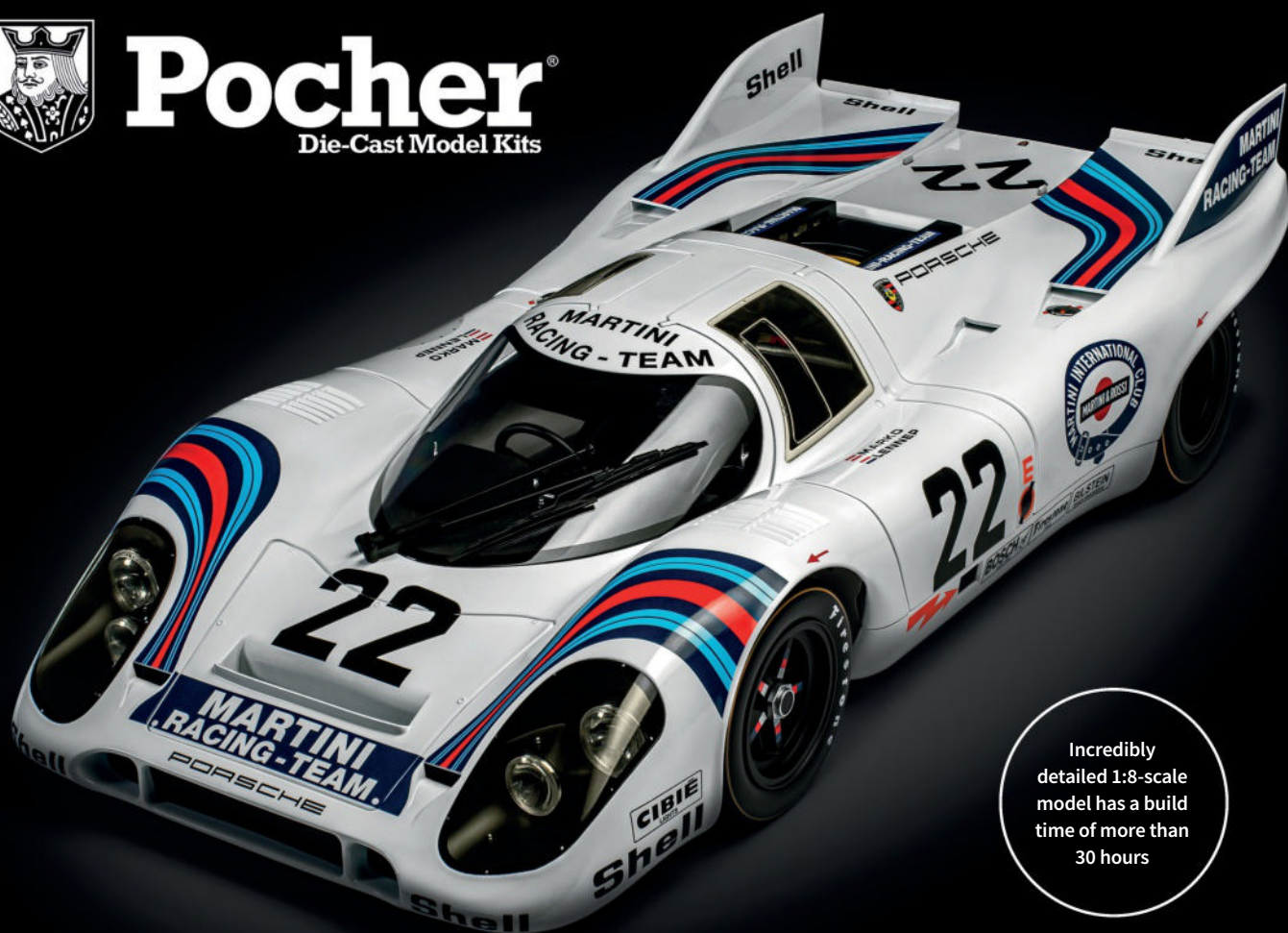
There's a desire to own more cars, perhaps one of his Formula Fords: he plans to "have some fun going historic racing" when he's done with his professional career. Where that takes him isn't clear because there will be a downsizing of the 963 roster for 2026. Porsche's drivers remained in the dark as to their futures as PPM was hoovering up the IMSA silverware at the Petit Le Mans finale in October.

On Campbell's bucket list is an overall Le Mans victory after falling 14s short this year in the WEC 963 shared with Estre and Vanthoor: "There are a few races I want to tick off and hopefully I'll be at the top level of sportscars for years to come." What is not clear for the moment is whether it will be with the manufacturer with which he made his journey there. ✽

"VICTORY AT A RACE PORSCHE HAD NEVER WON WAS A BIG TICK FOR MY CAREER"

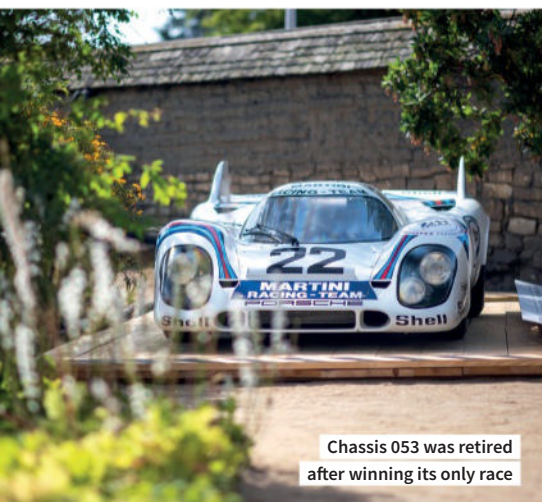


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NEW MODEL OF LE MANS LEGEND TO FUEL COLLECTORS' PASSION



Chassis 053 was retired after winning its only race

The Porsche 917 is one of the greatest racing machines of all time and there is now a very special model of a record-breaking example. Pocher, the renowned manufacturer of high-quality model car kits, has released a 1:8-scale kit of the iconic MARTINI-liveried 917K that won the 1971 Le Mans 24 Hours.

Italian brand Pocher's legacy stretches back almost six decades and aims to provide competitively priced large-scale model kits, producing faithful and accurate representations obsessing on the subject matter. And the 917 is a subject that is likely to grab the attention of established enthusiasts and collectors passionate about the finest automotive brands.

THE CAR

The 917 arrived in 1969 as Porsche's most powerful world sportscar championship contender yet. Initially a wayward monster, it was incredibly fast and should have won Le Mans that year but for a cracked bellhousing.

The car's troubled aerodynamics were sorted for 1970 and the 917K – K for *kurzheck*, or short tail – dominated the season, giving Porsche its first Le Mans win and the title.

The MARTINI Racing team was Porsche's second works squad for 1971, alongside the JW Automotive Engineering Gulf operation, and won the Sebring 12 Hours. Porsche continued relentless development, producing different bodywork options and pushing the



flat-12 engine's capacity from 4.5 litres to the full five litres allowed by the regulations. For Le Mans in 1971, one of its special cars was made with a magnesium chassis and given to MARTINI to run as number 22.

THE RACE

There were six factory-supported 917s entered for Le Mans in 1971 and the 4.9-litre MARTINI-liveried 917K of Helmut Marko and Gijs van Lennep qualified fifth, behind only the three long-tailed 917Ls and Penske-prepared Ferrari 512M.

Although not able to match the pace of the long-tailed 917s, Marko and van Lennep remained in the mix and moved forward as others hit trouble. The race came down to a straight fight between them and the Gulf 917K of 1970 Le Mans winner Richard Attwood and Herbert Muller.

Despite both being works cars and with a big advantage over the chasing Ferraris, Porsche allowed the battle to continue. Marko/van Lennep ultimately came out on top by two laps,

averaging more than 138mph and setting a distance record that would stand until 2010.

Chassis 053 had won its only race and was soon retired to the Porsche factory collection as one of the marque's great successes.

THE MODEL

Pocher's first 917K model kit won the Model Car Hall of Fame Kit of the Year in 2024, and the latest officially licensed model kit of the MARTINI livery continues the high-quality theme. We'd argue the 917 is one of the best-looking Le Mans racers ever, too.

This die-cast metal model kit includes over 316 pre-decorated parts, complete with more than 200 screws, allowing you to construct an incredibly detailed replica.

The model features working suspension and fully functional steering, moving doors and a clamshell engine cover, providing an interactive building experience. With a build time of more than 30 hours, it is perfect for both seasoned model builders and collectors, offering good value for

money and a rewarding challenge that culminates in a stunning display piece.

To enhance things even further, there's the exclusive Christmas collection with official MARTINI merchandise. This collector's bundle has everything you need to build and celebrate your model – the full die-cast kit and premium manual, plus MARTINI Racing lifestyle accessories: a beanie hat and ceramic mug. This offer is very limited – just 20 lucky people will obtain a gift free with purchase on Pocher's site.

Whether you're a 917 fan, Le Mans enthusiast or love building great models, this belongs on your Christmas list. ■

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Farewell to a Euro challenge

World Rally Championship crews enjoy a brief respite from the challenging Central European Rally stages at a tyre-fitting zone in the centre of Czech town Klatovy. It could be some time before WRC cars once again roar through the Czech Republic's incredibly taxing

asphalt stages, with 2025 being the last scheduled edition of the three-country rally. The concept of rallying across stages in Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic was novel, but funding issues have resulted in its demise. It will be remembered for providing plenty

of drama over its three-year stint, with Hyundai taking two wins to Toyota's one. This year's final iteration provided a pivotal moment in determining the destiny of the world title, thanks to the crash that befell part-timer Sebastien Ogier (see overleaf).



Photographer Michal Prouza/
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Rovanpera is still third in the points but has closed the gap

JAAUS REE / REDBULL CONTENT POOL

ROUND 12/14 CENTRAL EUROPEAN RALLY

- 1 Kalle Rovanpera/
Jonne Halttunen**
Toyota GR Yaris Rally1
(Toyota Gazoo Racing)
2h36m20.1s
- 2 Elfyn Evans/
Scott Martin**
Toyota GR Yaris Rally1
(Toyota Gazoo Racing)
+43.7s
- 3 Ott Tanak/
Martin Jarveoja**
Hyundai i20 N Rally1
(Hyundai Motorsport)
+49.3s

POINTS 1 Evans 247; 2 Sebastien Ogier 234; 3 Rovanpera 234.

WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

ROVANPERA WINS TOYOTA DUEL AFTER OGIER CRASHES

Kalle Rovanpera boosted his hopes of a third World Rally Championship crown by taking victory at the Central European Rally, helping Toyota secure a ninth manufacturers' crown.

Rovanpera and co-driver Jonne Halttunen successfully navigated 17 tricky stages held in the Czech Republic, Germany and Austria to seal a valuable 18th career win by 43.7 seconds from title rival and Toyota colleague Elfyn Evans, who regained the championship lead.

Team-mates Sebastien Ogier and Rovanpera quickly pulled clear of the field through Thursday and Friday, with Ogier leading by

3.9s when the crews reached Friday's midday tyre-fitting zone. Two consecutive stage wins then closed Rovanpera to 0.3s off Ogier, before the Finn ended the day 0.6s adrift. Ogier and Rovanpera were in a league of their own, almost half a minute clear of the chasing pack led by Evans.

Rovanpera assumed the lead after winning Saturday morning's stage nine; then Ogier, who had started the rally with a two-point lead in the standings, crashed in spectacular fashion. A puncture that had gone undetected by his tyre pressure alarm system resulted in his car veering off

the road and into a tree. It was his first retirement of the season, blowing the title race wide open.

Ogier's exit handed Rovanpera a relatively comfortable 36.3s lead to take into Sunday's final four stages. But, with Ogier rejoining under Super Rally rules and eager to score the maximum 10 Super Sunday points, Rovanpera was obliged to push – he had started the round 21 points behind in the championship.

Ogier achieved his goal of topping the Super Sunday Classification and the Power Stage to limit the damage of his Saturday exit, while Rovanpera held his nerve to take the victory. He scored 31 points, including six on Super Sunday.

Evans endured a challenging rally, struggling to find the speed of his team-mates. A 5s penalty for hitting a hay bale in a chicane on Thursday left him eighth on Friday morning, but by the end of the day he'd recovered to third.

Evans then became locked in a fight with the leading Hyundai of Ott Tanak across Saturday, losing the position to an inspired

Estonian who was struggling with his 2024-spec i20 N. Tanak took an 8.4s margin over Evans into the final day, but a moment in stage 17, where his team-mate Thierry Neuville had hit trouble, ceded second. Evans took advantage and now leads the championship by 13 points from Ogier and Rovanpera, with Tanak 50 adrift.

Takamoto Katsuta picked up two stage wins on his way to a strong fourth in his Toyota, ahead of Adrien Fourmaux, whose Hyundai ran as high as third before struggling for pace.

Reigning world champion Neuville retired after a nasty crash into a bridge on Sunday morning that cancelled stage 15. Neuville and co-driver Martijn Wydaeghe returned to service after precautionary checks in hospital. They had already lost more than a minute to a puncture caused by hitting a bank in stage five.

Sami Pajari enjoyed a trouble-free rally to finish sixth, ahead of the M-Sport Ford of Josh McErlean, who matched his career best finish in seventh. McErlean's team-mate Gregoire Munster finished the event under Super Rally rules after retiring on Friday due to broken rear suspension caused by the same bank that Neuville struck.

TOM HOWARD



Puncture pitched
Ogier's Toyota into a tree

JAAUS REE / REDBULL CONTENT POOL

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LISTA



INSIDER

Hyundai might not be done with the WRC just yet, hopes Tom Howard

It wasn't long ago that the World Rally Championship service park was seemingly convinced that Hyundai would end its factory programme at the conclusion of the current campaign. In August, it quashed that theory by committing to the final season of the Rally1 era next year, and now there is renewed hope that the South Korean marque could continue into the WRC's new dawn in 2027.

Hyundai's long-term future in the WRC has been unclear for several months. It has been among the most critical of the 2027 technical regulations, which are designed to be more flexible and affordable to attract manufacturers and tuners. In the view of Hyundai Motorsport president and team principal Cyril Abiteboul, the new regulations have been simplified too much, restricting manufacturers from showcasing technology aligned with current automotive trends.

The WRC27 cars, featuring a spaceframe chassis built by manufacturers and tuners to a €345,000 cost cap, will be largely based on current Rally2 machinery, including the internal combustion engine. It means the overall performance will be close to the current Rally2 cars. The FIA has stated that in the future it will open up the use of alternative powertrains, although a date is yet to be set.

"How can we make the car more exciting for the fans, and how can we make this car a value proposition for the OEM [original equipment manufacturer] to invest?" asked Abiteboul back in May. "Where is the leadership and what is the long-term vision? If you invest in cars that are supposed to take us for 10 years, and if you look at the car and the level of technology in those cars, and what the world will be looking like in 2036, I don't think there is a fit between this car and the next 10 years."

That stance remains unchanged, although Hyundai has now confirmed it will be present in 2026; an "additional season also gives us the time to shape the

future of Hyundai Motorsport with greater confidence", according to Abiteboul. There's no doubt a wish within Hyundai to stay involved, since it has invested a lot into the WRC since 2014. Its successful 'N' performance road cars are largely linked to its rally exploits.

The recent decision to recruit former FIA road sport director and long-time M-Sport chief Andrew Wheatley is perhaps a sign that Hyundai is thinking seriously about finding a way to continuing in rallying at the top level. "It is clear our activities are growing and diversifying [with a move into the 2026 World Endurance Championship under the Genesis marque] and this is a stretch for the management of the team," Abiteboul tells this writer. "I'm also not shy in accepting that this year has been a challenge and maybe there has been some impact between the many things that are happening in the background. Simply a reaction needed to be taken."

"It was about finding someone passionate about rally, and with very up-to-date knowledge and understanding in order to not just manage the operation as it is but also build up what could be the future programme for Hyundai. Nothing is decided in relation to that, but if we want to be in control of our own destiny we need the [right] people."

Wheatley's appointment should be taken as a positive step regarding Hyundai's future in rallying. But one thing that's certain is that Hyundai has ruled out the possibility of developing a new car for 2027. This doesn't mean it won't be present in the WRC after 2026 – from 2027 the FIA has stated that, to help phase in the ruleset successfully, current Rally2 machinery will be eligible to compete in the top class alongside the new WRC27 cars, given the performance between the two sets of regulations would be similar. Hyundai is considering upgrading its Rally2-spec i20 N for such an eventuality, which would also buy it more time to weigh up its options on developing a new

"It was about finding someone passionate about rally, and with very up-to-date knowledge"

car for the long-term future.

"With a new spec technical regulation, this train is probably gone but making sure we have an up-to-date Rally2 specification for 2027 is still possible," points out Abiteboul.

He has raised concerns regarding how WRC27 and Rally2 cars will compete on a level playing field. The FIA has answered this by stating that if its ongoing simulations to ensure parity between WRC27 and Rally2 cars show a significant gulf, an adjustment of vehicle minimum weights will be made.

Time will tell whether Hyundai takes this path, which could lead to a long-term future. Given the narrative has been turned 180 degrees in recent months, the odds on it continuing in the WRC from 2027 could be shortening. ❧



Rovanpera relishes the prospect of "starting basically from zero"

JURTIIN/RED BULL CONTENT/AT POOL

STEPPING INTO THE UNKNOWN

Rallying prodigy Kalle Rovanpera has blazed a trail in his motorsport career. In a remarkable change of direction, he's setting out to conquer circuit racing

TOM HOWARD

"I f Kalle cannot do it, then nobody can." That's a ringing endorsement from one of Kalle Rovanpera's inner circle as the two-time World Rally champion prepares for a groundbreaking switch from rallying to single-seater racing – with Formula 1 the ultimate aim.

Those words are from Rovanpera's Toyota WRC team-mate and close friend Takamoto Katsuta, a driver who has some idea of the world Rovanpera is about to enter. Katsuta grew up in Japan with the dream of reaching F1, climbing the karting and single-seater ranks, and finishing runner-up in the 2013 Japanese Formula 3 Championship. But that dream came to a premature end. It was replaced by an all-encompassing challenge of transforming into a rally driver competing in the WRC for Toyota, culminating in more than a half-century of stage wins and multiple podium finishes at the highest level.

It was a move that led Katsuta to cross paths with Rovanpera and has generated a strong friendship during events and away from the crucible of competition, when the pair are often in each other's company.

Since the pair first met a decade ago, when a fresh-faced 14-year-old Rovanpera was rallying in Latvia, the Finn has been an inspiration and a confidante to Katsuta. Over the ensuing years, Rovanpera has been more than happy to help the Japanese adjust to the rally world. Now it appears that the favour will be returned as Rovanpera prepares to live out Katsuta's dream.

"My dream was of course F1 or racing in a top category in circuit racing until I came to rallying," explains Katsuta. "Now it feels like Kalle is able to carry on my dream. I'm supporting him, and of course I feel sad a bit as I will miss him, but at the same time

I'm very happy that he will do a new challenge. It's really cool. It feels very special.

"Driving skills, I have not doubt in Kalle, he is definitely a special talent. When I saw him for the first time he was 14 and I had just started rallying and I was shocked by how good he was. We have shared many moments and nice memories. Of course, we are competing and we are always trying to get the best results, but still we are having fun, and sometimes doing stupid things. He is a real friend."

Circuit racers such as Katsuta making the switch to rallying is not wholly unusual. 2007 F1 world champion Kimi Raikkonen, double world champion Fernando Alonso and 2008 Hungarian Grand Prix

"Kalle is definitely a special talent. When I saw him for the first time I was shocked by how good he was"

winner Heikki Kovalainen are among this limited group. Kovalainen has even found success in the discipline, becoming a three-time champion in Japan's national rally championship. Alonso showed his speed to finish 13th at the notorious Dakar Rally in 2020, while a fifth at Rally Turkey in 2010 was Raikkonen's best WRC result.

But the route from rallying to high-level single-seater racing is a move into less charted waters. Rally drivers including Colin McRae and Sebastien Ogier have driven F1 cars in one-off tests, while nine-time world champion Sebastien Loeb has come the closest after impressing in an official post-season Barcelona test with Red Bull in 2008, logging the eighth fastest time >>

among 17 runners. Loeb was even in the running to replace Sebastien Bourdais at Red Bull's sister team Toro Rosso the following year.

Rovanpera is trying to go one step further after calling time on his WRC career at the end of this season. Next year, he will leave behind the 'comfort' of gravel, asphalt and snow stages to compete on the Japanese circuits – including the famous Fuji and Suzuka – in Super Formula, with the aim of making the transition to Formula 2 in 2027. The plan is bold but has the backing from Toyota. The goal in Rovanpera's own words is to reach the "highest level possible", with the 25-year-old inspired by the challenge of achieving something truly remarkable.

Rovanpera has shown maturity beyond his years to become the WRC's youngest ever podium finisher, rally winner, world champion and double world champion. But this next chapter of his career will be perhaps his toughest.

Rovanpera is under no illusions regarding what lies ahead. Prior to a test in an F2 car at Jerez in October, his only experience in formula cars came during a promotional day at the Red Bull Ring last year where he drove Formula 4 and Formula Renault 3.5 machinery, before jumping into a Red Bull RB8 F1 car – a moment that helped to solidify his career direction. Apart from that, Rovanpera's circuit racing career is limited to a campaign last year in the Porsche Carrera Cup Benelux, in which he won three races, plus an outing in the Italian series.

He may be about to embark upon a voyage into the unknown, but Rovanpera won't be doing it without the support of Katsuta, who is well placed to explain

"I will get my ass kicked for sure at the beginning, and that is how it should be"

the challenges. "I've been talking about this transition a lot with Taka already from one year ago when I started to think about it," says Rovanpera. "Obviously he has been supporting me a lot. He always tries to come when it's the first time in a car for me just to support me, and tell me all the tips from the track. It will be good.

"I will be starting basically from zero, so I will be far away at the beginning. I know it and have prepared mentally that I will get my ass kicked for sure at the beginning, and that is how it should be. If it's not like this then it will be a bit weird. That is the challenge I like. I like to push myself from zero and learn some new skills."

"It's driving a car but it's totally different, racing compared to rallying," points out Katsuta. "One thing I found out, my brain works totally different when driving a rally car compared to a racing car. Your eyes are working differently and you have to listen to the pacenotes and concentrate.

"Of course, in racing you are driving to the limit and you have someone trying to overtake you. The most difficult thing is you have to push on the limit. It is down to thousandths of a second and such a small amount of time you have to take from every single corner. That is also very different and difficult. For sure, Kalle can drive, but this sort of feeling will be a bit different.

"In F1 and Super Formula you have only one lap where there is maximum tyre grip. You have one lap to warm up and then straight away you are flat-out. You never know how much grip you have, so that you get with experience. There are skills to feel the maximum grip and the car potential, so he will need time to adapt to that. But we know the way he adapts is so quick, and I'm sure he can do that well."

While Katsuta didn't reach the heights of Super Formula, his knowledge of Japanese circuits and his connections could prove valuable. But the 32-year-old doesn't see himself as tutor for his friend, who he believes will quickly adjust to life on the race tracks.

"Some of the tracks, yes I can offer advice, but at the same time I don't want to confuse him as I have never driven in Super Formula, and nowadays the car is totally different and tyres are different to what I was driving in F3," relates Katsuta.

"What I'm trying to do is see if I can help somehow. I will ask my friends to give him advice. For example, Ryo Hirakawa was competing in Super Formula and was very quick. He can probably help a bit, and at the same time nowadays the simulator is very realistic and useful. These kinds of things I can do and give the information. I'm not really teaching. He is going racing and straight away I believe he is going to be better than me."

But when it comes to tips on living in Japan, or the drifting scene, of which Rovanpera is a huge admirer, Katsuta will most definitely be a fount of knowledge. "Maybe this is more easy to do," smiles Katsuta. "I will give him all the tips about life in Japan. At the same time I want to come and spectate at some of his races if it matches my schedule."

There is no hiding away from the monumental yet fascinating challenge that lies ahead of Rovanpera, but Katsuta is convinced that his friend is the one to achieve it: "You never know the future, but I think there will be nobody else that can do this kind of move. If this turns into a success, then probably Kalle is the only one who can do it." ❄



JURTI/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

Sampling single-seaters at Red Bull promo day proved a pivotal moment for the Finn



BANKS/MCKLEIN

Rovanpera has aided Katsuta's switch from circuit to special stage...



ISHIHARA/LAT/GETTY IMAGES

...and the Japanese driver, here in his home F3 series in 2013, is returning the favour



Driving a Red Bull RB8 cemented Rovanpera's change of direction

JURTI/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

TOURING CARS



Larson's luck, Hamlin's hurt

Kyle Larson's #5 Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet crosses the line in third place at the conclusion of a dramatic season finale at Phoenix Raceway to claim a surprise second NASCAR Cup title. Denny Hamlin, who had dominated the event in his Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota until

the final caution, leading 208 of 319 laps to Larson's zero, couldn't make up lost ground following an overtime restart, having pitted for four new tyres; crucially, Larson took two. Hamlin, in the blue and white car on the furthest left close to the barrier, failed to improve on sixth place in the dash to the flag,

stating afterwards he was "numb" at the shock of falling short. Larson, in turn, was stunned by the manner of his success: "I can't believe it. We didn't lead a lap today. Somehow won the championship." Meanwhile, the race win went to the #12 Team Penske Ford of Ryan Blaney.



Photographer Meg Oliphant/
Getty Images

Where Phoenix Raceway, Arizona
When Sunday 2 November 2025

Details Canon EOS R3
EF15mm f/2.8 fisheye lens,
1/8000th @ F4.5



SUPERCARS CHAMPIONSHIP

PAYNE AND TANDER TAKE
DRAMATIC BATHURST 1000

In one of the most dramatic races ever seen at Mount Panorama, Matt Payne and Garth Tander gave Grove Racing and Ford victory in the Bathurst 1000. After a long day that featured sun and rain, and a race that ended in near-darkness, 23-year-old New Zealander Payne scored his maiden Bathurst win, and Tander his sixth victory in 27 starts in Australia's great race.

Typically, controversy bookended the event. Almost seven hours of action featured favourites leading then falling back, crashes, clashes, seven safety car periods and a finish that was far from what it seemed.

The contenders for the win took shape with 26 laps to go. James Golding led in the PremiAir Racing Chevrolet from Ryan Wood (Walkinshaw Andretti United Ford), Payne, David Reynolds (Team 18 Chevrolet), Cooper Murray (Erebus Motorsport Chevrolet) and Andre Heimgartner (Brad Jones Racing Chevrolet).

How they got to that point was a race within a race. The opening laps of 161, in the dry, were led by Todd Hazelwood in the Dick Johnson Racing Mustang that Brodie Kostecki had put on pole. That was a story in itself; Kostecki in particular had been outspoken pre-race about the lack of action in what he saw as a justified

parity adjustment to the Mustangs, based on what the Ford teams believed was a mismatch with the Chevrolet engine based on their performance at different parts of their rev ranges. In spite of that, and a raft of recent aerodynamic changes to the Fords, DJR lodged a protest over the matter on Saturday afternoon – just hours before four Mustangs locked out the first two rows of the grid. The protest was dismissed – suffice to say the race started under a cloud.

That increased to 'clouds' around lap 64

when, after a few spots of rain, the heavens opened. At that point many of the co-drivers stepped up. In the Golding car, veteran David Russell (who had dominated the weekend's Porsche Carrera Cup races) led by as much as 10 seconds before a safety car closed up the field. Erebus's decision to start lead driver Murray in its car, at odds with most of the field, was justified by some fine stints from Jobe Stewart, the 21-year-old's assured driving belying his Bathurst 1000 rookie status.

One by one the leaders had their moments,



KALISZ/GETTY IMAGES



RESULTS ROUND 10/13

- Matt Payne/Garth Tander**
Ford Mustang S650
(Grove Racing)
161 laps in 6h52m14.9378s
Grid 18th (2m04.5998s)
- David Reynolds/Lee Holdsworth**
Chevrolet Camaro ZL1
(Team 18)
+0.9588s
Grid 15th (2m04.4442s)
- James Golding/David Russell**
Chevrolet Camaro ZL1
(PremiAir Racing)
+4.0396s
(5s penalty for causing a collision)
Grid 13th (2m04.3268s)
- Cooper Murray/Jobe Stewart**
Chevrolet Camaro ZL1
(Erebus Motorsport)
+4.6969s
Grid 6th (2m04.6004s)
- Cam Hill/Cameron McLeod**
Chevrolet Camaro ZL1
(Matt Stone Racing)
+7.7162s
Grid 8th (2m04.8845s)
- Broc Feeney/Jamie Whincup**
Chevrolet Camaro ZL1
(Triple Eight Race Engineering)
+11.2161s
Grid 5th (2m04.5940s)
- Andre Heimgartner/Declan Fraser**
Chevrolet Camaro ZL1
(Brad Jones Racing)
+14.0828s
Grid 19th (2m04.6150s)
- Kai Allen/Dale Wood**
Ford Mustang S650
(Grove Racing)
+22.0693s
Grid 21st (2m04.7007s)
- Aaron Cameron/Zak Best**
Ford Mustang S650
(Blanchard Racing)
+23.3841s
Grid 20th (2m04.6598s)
- Zach Bates/Craig Lowndes**
Chevrolet Camaro ZL1
(Triple Eight Race Engineering)
+25.8216s
Grid 16th (2m04.4843s)

Pole **Brodie Kostecki**
(Dick Johnson Racing Ford)
2m04.0413s (112.044mph)

Fastest lap **Will Brown**
(Triple Eight Chevrolet)
2m06.7265s (109.670mph)

POINTS 1 **Feeney** 2328; 2 **Payne** 2272;
3 **Brown** 2021.

few bigger than the one that befell Payne with nine laps to go, spearing off at The Chase and dropping him from the lead to third.

With five to go, Golding made the decisive move of the race, looking inside leader Murray at Griffin's Bend. The attempted pass tapped Murray into a half-spin, dropping him to fourth. As a result, and consistent with incidents earlier in the race, Golding was hit with a 5s penalty, putting Payne back in the box seat.

Golding regained the lead at the start of the final lap and Payne's crew told him seconds later: "Our race is with Reynolds." They were right; the 2017 race winner looked to swoop into the lead around the outside at The Cutting and the two Camaros touched. Their battle allowed Golding to scamper away, although he was never going to make up enough ground to cover the 5s penalty. He took the chequered flag first, but the penalty dropped him to third place.

Reynolds and co-driver Lee Holdsworth were therefore second from Golding/Russell, with Murray/Stewart a disappointed (but hardly disappointing) fourth. Next, following a solid run, staying clear of trouble through most of the race, was the Matt Stone Racing Chevrolet of Cam Hill/Cameron McLeod. Hill drove a largely unheralded but excellent final stanza to go from 13th to fifth in 26 laps, and finish ahead of the first of the Triple Eight cars.

Broc Feeney's last-lap pass on Heimgartner for sixth place saved some face for the points leader, who had earlier planted the Triple Eight Chevrolet into the tyre barrier at Forrest's Elbow, but it soured Heimgartner's whole season. The loss of one position dropped him to 11th in the overall standings, and elevated Kai Allen to 10th and into Supercars' Finals series as its last seed. The Grove Racing rookie had himself endured a rough race,

being punted off the road twice in under a minute and then, when tacking down Conrod Straight at 170mph, missing a kangaroo that was looking for shelter from the blinding rain by about two inches.

On the weekend when its 2026 Toyota Supra prototype made its public debut, it was a nightmarish Sunday for the WAU's final Bathurst as a Ford team. Chaz Mostert and Wood started from the second row and both looked possible winners, before Mostert stopped mid-race when an engine sensor failed, the two-time winner immediately finding a welcoming campsite to soothe his disappointment with a cool beverage. And with 22 laps to go Wood was out, also with engine problems after a strong effort shared with an impressive Jayden Ojeda, who surely must find a full-time Supercars seat soon.

The DJR Fords were little better off, Kostecki experiencing clutch and then alternator problems in the wake of Tony D'Alberto binning the sister Mustang he shared with Will Davison at Forrest's Elbow. Another veteran also had drama there, Mark Winterbottom hitting the wall in the Tickford Mustang on lap 71. After losing a lap to repairs, all Cam Waters could do was drag the car back to 12th at the flag.

The smallest two-car team in the pitlane, Blanchard Racing, probably deserved more than ninth and a DNF. At one point, despite a hard hit on a concrete wall, Aaron Cameron/Zak Best were looking comfortable in second place, while Jack Perkins, in the BRT Ford shared with James Courtney, appeared similarly settled just four places further back...

But through the low cloud and near-darkness (the race started at a latest-ever time of 1145am) Payne and Tander emerged as deserving winners.

PHIL BRANAGAN

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INSIDER

Who were the real stars of NASCAR 2025? Nick DeGroot ponders

The 2025 NASCAR Cup season has reached its conclusion, and what an ending it was. Kyle Larson came out of seemingly nowhere to win the championship, becoming the first under the current format to win the title without leading any laps in the championship race. More interestingly, Larson's last win of the year came back in May before his Indianapolis 500/Coke 600 double attempt. That's something we haven't seen from a Cup champion since before the playoffs existed, back in 2003 with Matt Kenseth and a full-season championship.

There's no questioning that Larson has been one of the most consistent drivers this year, tied for the most top-fives and top-10s, but this title left many (including Larson himself) in disbelief. He lagged behind Denny Hamlin and Hendrick Motorsports team-mate William Byron for most of the race, but capitalised on a late yellow, using a two-tyre call to grab some track position for a two-lap dash to the flag.

Larson was the only driver to 'point' his way into the championship round, as the other three title combatants all punched their ticket to the finale with big wins in the Round of 8. Larson almost seemed like a non-story throughout the playoffs, quietly working his way through each round. And while Larson is certainly worthy of the crown, his title run is still an outlier in a format that is all about winning. And it was a bitter defeat for Hamlin, who led 208 of 319 laps, but buried himself deep in the pack after deciding to sacrifice track position for four fresh tyres during the final pitstop.

Hamlin was truly the story of 2025, once again falling short of the crown in his 20th season. He started the year by wrecking out of the Daytona 500 while leading on the final lap, has been embroiled in a contentious lawsuit between the team he co-owns and NASCAR, and seemed to be involved in every bit of drama during the playoffs. He had a run-in with team-mate Ty Gibbs (grandson of Joe Gibbs Racing's owner), walled his own driver out of playoff

contention while attempting to get a historic 60th win that ultimately came a few weeks later, was on the receiving end of Ross Chastain's banzai move in a failed attempt to avoid elimination in the Round of 12, and of course dominated the entire Phoenix weekend... until the final restart.

Hamlin's heartbreaking loss and 10-time 2025 winner Connor Zilisch's defeat in the NASCAR Xfinity Series title race have only intensified the debate around the championship format, which is expected to be altered for 2026 with a move away from a one-race format.

And while Hamlin was 'the' star of 2025, he wasn't the only one. His new team-mate in the #19 came so close to becoming a champion in his first year with JGR, with Chase Briscoe ending the year third in the standings. That included a big crown jewel win for Briscoe, who went back-to-back in the Southern 500 at Darlington with two different teams. Each crown jewel had quite the story to go along with it, in fact. Chastain drove from last to first in a back-up car to win the Coca-Cola 600, which had never been done before. Bubba Wallace ended a lengthy winless streak by besting Larson for the Brickyard 400 win at Indianapolis, and Byron went back-to-back in the Daytona 500 when the entire top five crashed together right in front of him.

But a true standout in 2025 was Shane van Gisbergen. The Supercars star has rattled the NASCAR world, especially for those who didn't know the name before his arrival. He won five consecutive road/street course races in the most wins ever achieved by a rookie in their first full-time season. Only Hamlin won more races in 2025. SVG also made noticeable improvements on ovals throughout the year, recently scoring his first oval top-10. As Larson pointed out, with his road course dominance, a season where van Gisbergen can run consistently in the top 10 on ovals would be problematic for the rest of the field. NASCAR's newest Rookie of the Year ended the season 12th in the standings,

"A true standout in 2025 was Shane van Gisbergen, who has rattled the NASCAR world"

two spots behind his Trackhouse team-mate, Chastain.

One of the big positives for NASCAR has been the improved on-track product at certain tracks where passing was once near-impossible with the current generation of car. Goodyear produced a tyre that has allowed drivers to control their destiny a bit more. However, as we saw at Phoenix, that also resulted in a plethora of tyre failures. Now, that's not the fault of Goodyear, but the teams going well below the recommended air pressures on these softer compounds in an effort to gain a speed advantage.

While the action on track was thrilling, the anti-trust lawsuit still hangs over the sport like a dark cloud. 23XI Racing and Front Row Motorsports are accusing NASCAR of being an unlawful monopoly and, unless a settlement can be reached soon, it will go to trial in December. ❄



Opel Finishes on Mutton bow

The Walter Hayes Trophy event is not solely about Formula Fords, and this year's fixture featured the return of the Mutton Grand Prix. The Allcomers contest can trace its origins to 1947 when a group of Frazer Nash drivers decided to hold an unofficial race around

Silverstone airfield, but one of them struck a sheep... An eclectic mix of 44 cars entered this year's edition, including Nic Strong's newly acquired Opel Commodore (above). The car – which has FIA papers – previously tackled Finnish rallies and races (even the switches

are still labelled in Finnish), and Strong realised his long-held dream to race one of the machines in the Mutton. He finished 23rd from the back (after qualifying his Marcos) while Charlie Kennedy's Nissan GTR dominated to secure the special sheep-shaped trophy.



Photographer Steve Jones

Where Silverstone,
Northamptonshire, UK

When Sunday 2 November 2025

Details Nikon D500,
180.0-400.0mm lens, 1/640th @ F11



JEP

BTCC

Qualifying races for BTCC

Exact details of the new contests for 2026 are still being worked out but they are set to last for around 15 minutes

MARCUS SIMMONS

The British Touring Car Championship will feature no fewer than 40 races in 2026. That's because series organiser TOCA is introducing a qualifying race to run on the Saturday afternoon at each of the 10 race weekends.

The normal phases of free practice and qualifying will all continue as before, and the qualifying race will set the grid for the first race of the day on Sundays. Other than that, hard details are in short supply, and that's because the move was proposed not as normal by TOCA supremo Alan Gow, but by the

teams themselves during their traditional post-season meeting.

"The reason why we haven't worked things out yet is because it caught us on the hoof," said Gow

prior to a further meeting on the first weekend of November where it was anticipated that myriad sporting matters would be thrashed out. "The majority



JEP

of the teams suggested it, so we thought we'll give it a try. Now we've got to come up with the regulations, but that's the reason why we've done it back to front!"

Gow was able to give some indication as to where things will likely settle, outlining that the qualifying race would be "probably around 15 minutes, about 60% of a regular championship race".

Regarding the allocation of TOCA Turbo Boost and the accompanying handicaps meted out to the leading runners in the championship, he explained that this would be available on a per-lap basis as in qualifying as opposed to a set number of laps used in races. "It's a [further] qualifying session," he explained. "You take your Sunday race hat off and it's different rules allowed."

As a result of this philosophy, the TTB usage allowed for each competitor in the first race on each Sunday will not be impacted by the qualifying race and will be based, as before, on championship position.

Regarding tyre compound rules, Gow said "we'll go through that in the meeting", while there will be downscaled points on offer for the Saturday race. "There are two schools of thought on that," he said. "The thinking is we'll go for half points [but not a literal halving to avoid competitors' tallies including fractions], without a point for pole position."

While it was suggested to Gow that one byproduct of the addition of the qualifying race could be to bolster the Saturday entertainment prior to the planned arrival of the Junior series in 2027, he pointed out that the roster of support championships is already full for next year.

"It promises to be a hit among drivers, teams, fans and stakeholders," he added. "The addition of some short, sharp racing action on Saturday will certainly spice things up and will provide a further great spectacle to the weekend show for everyone."



Tatuus parent company has acquired leading kart brands

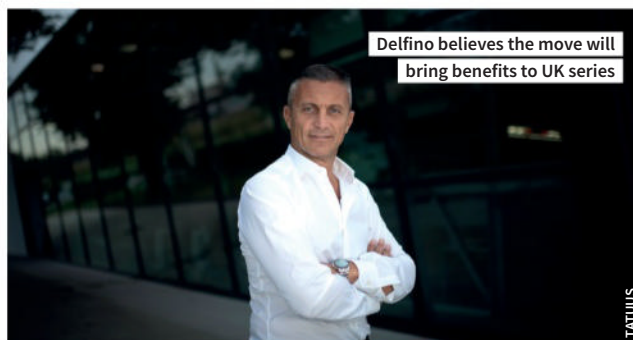
KARTING/GB3/GB4/F4

TATUUS OWNER UNITES KART AND CAR BRANDS

The parent company of Italian constructor Tatuus has acquired some of the leading brands from the karting world. It now brings karting and single-seater categories including Formula 4, GB3 and GB4 under the same umbrella in what has been described as 'a comprehensive hub for 360-degree racing'.

Tatuus, which supplies the spec cars for all three of the UK's career-ladder single-seater series, plus its sister company, F4 Abarth engine supplier Autotecnica Motori (ATM), now belong among a new conglomerate known as Korus Group. Alongside them, majority acquisitions of leading kart firms BirelArt, IAME and Kart Republic have expanded the portfolio into racing's early steps.

Electronics company Next Solution Technologies, which already supplied to Tatuus, is newly on board too in a group that also includes mechanical parts producer Breda Racing



and, since 2024, carbon fibre expert YCOM.

"We had an opportunity which was a little bit enlarging the philosophy of the group, through some advisors, to enter BirelArt," said Korus CEO and long-time ATM chief Giovanni Delfino. "We were around the table and we were thinking about the original concept of the group: that was to have a group of Italian niches dealing with motorsport to create a 360-degree product. That was to do cars. But also we had the opportunity to have an important and famous brand in

karting, so the horizontal expansion was becoming also a vertical expansion in terms of driver career. A few days ago we closed also with IAME and Kart Republic."

Delfino believes the strengthened links with karting can only benefit the Tatuus-based series, including the trio in the UK. "Absolutely," he said. "The karting world is a sort of tank feeding all our other series."

Tatuus co-founder Gianfranco de Bellis remains an integral part of Korus in his role as president.

MARCUS SIMMONS

GARY HAWKINS



JEARY'S FALCONER DESIGN FAILS TO FLY

Ian Jeary debuted distinctive 'Falconer' bodywork on his 1971 Elden Mk8 in the Formula Ford Festival. Controversial in period, the Dennis Falconer-designed profiles and high wing mirrors were used by Johnny Gerber to win the 1972 World Final. But Jeary's Gerber tribute car (above) suffered cooling woes.

DOHERTY PLANS MORE ENGLISH FORD

Northern Irish champion Ronan Doherty is targeting a full United Formula Ford campaign next year after impressing on his Festival debut. He qualified second for his heat and finished third, then retired from his semi-final after running over debris.

FIRST BRITISH F4 DRIVERS REVEALED

Ginetta Junior graduates Ethan Carney (Fortec) and Jarrett Clark (Virtuosi) are among the first batch of 2026 British Formula 4 drivers. Fiesta Junior contender Daniella Sutton will be with CDR as sophomore Joseph Smith swaps Hitech for Virtuosi.

EUSER AND JONES REALISE F1 DREAM

Two motorsport stars had a rare outing in a Formula 1 car at Donington Park recently. Sportscar stalwart, Marcos proponent and 1981 European F1 champion Cor Euser and fellow FF1600 legend Karl Jones both sampled Warren Briggs's ex-John Watson McLaren M29C.



DUTCH TEEN CHOSEN AS GINETTA SCHOLAR

Dutch teen Devon Hagelen (above) has been selected as the youngest-ever Ginetta Junior scholar. Having achieved karting success in his homeland, he impressed judges at the Blyton Park shootout to land the prize drive when he was aged just 13.

CLASSIC TIN-TOPS TO SUPPORT BTCC AGAIN

The Classic Touring Car Racing Club will make another guest outing on the British Touring Car bill next year. After a successful visit to Croft in 2024 by its Pre-'66 series, this time the Group 1 machines of the Pre-'83 division will get the chance to join the modern tin-tops at Oulton Park.

HISTORIC MODSPORTS TO SMRC PORTFOLIO

The Historic Modsports & Special Saloons category has entered a formal partnership with the Scottish Motor Racing Club, having paired with the Scottish Classic Sports & Saloon series at times this season. Thruxton Retro and Castle Combe Autumn Classic are on the 2026 schedule.

DOUBLE BLOW FOR GEOFF STEEL RACING

Two key figures at Geoff Steel Racing have died recently. Eponymous team founder Steel died in October, having enjoyed a long association with BMW, initially as a driver and then as a preparer. One of the team's Britcar racers, Lee Goldsmith, also died a few weeks later.

Cupra driver captured TCR UK title at Brands Hatch recently



TCR UK

Shepherd set to graduate to TCR Europe

Newly crowned TCR UK champion Adam Shepherd is set to compete in TCR Europe next year.

Shepherd sealed the UK title aboard his Capture Motorsport-run Cupra Leon VZ at Brands Hatch in early November. After taking his eighth win of the season in the weekend's opening contest, he drove cautiously to secure the crown by finishing sixth in the reversed-grid race.

"I don't think I've ever driven a race as slow in my life," smiled Shepherd.

Subject to medical approval, after suffering broken vertebrae last year, Shepherd was due to test at Barcelona with Cupra-backed Spanish squad Monlau Motorsport ahead of contesting the final round of TCR Spain. He said: "It's a bit of a dry run to see if we can piece together a TCR Europe deal with them next year, so we're all excited about that."

Callum Newsham scored a first UK win for the Hyundai Elantra in the season finale, securing second in the standings. His participation had been in doubt after a heavy

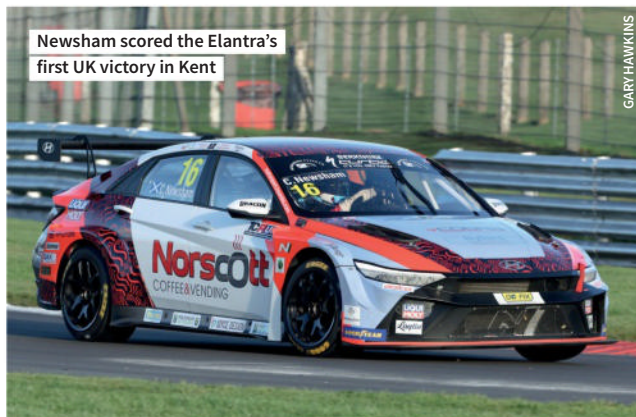
accident in the previous round but Geoff Edmundson – father of Mini Challenge racer Max – was able to repair the shell at his Annfield Autos business. "They took the car in and sorted it within a few days," said a grateful Newsham.

Two-time TCR UK champion Lewis Kent, meanwhile, will return to the championship in 2026 after a three-year absence. Kent, champion in 2020 and 2021, will drive the Lynk & Co 03 occasionally raced by Ryan Bensley. "I feel like manufacturers and factory teams are taking a bit more interest in TCR at the moment than they were three or four years ago," said Kent. "If we can do well in the Lynk & Co in the UK, we might be able to work a deal of pushing into Europe."

Also joining next year's grid will be at least two brand-new Honda Civic Type R FL5s. The cars, built by Honda partner JAS Motorsport, will be run for JAS-backed young drivers by the new DTR squad of Darryl Taplin, who played a key role in Chris Smiley's 2022 triumph with Restart Racing.

MARK PAULSON

Newsham scored the Elantra's first UK victory in Kent





RYAN AUTOSPORT NATIONAL RANKINGS

SMYTH ON THE CHARGE AS BRAY NOW LOOKS UNSTOPPABLE

Ali Bray is virtually assured of top spot in this year's Ryan Motorsport Insurance Autosport National Rankings, with barely a handful of events remaining this season, after taking his victory tally to 23.

Mazda MX-5 master Bray ended the campaign unbeaten in the British Racing & Sports Car Club's championship for Mk1 models of the popular Japanese sportscar, taking another three wins at the Silverstone finale. His lead still stands at five victories, meaning it would take a Herculean effort from someone competing across multiple categories to overhaul Bray now.

One driver who has done plenty of winning of late is Jason Smyth. Victory in the Formula Ford Festival and Walter Hayes Trophy finals (see p140), along with heat and semi-final triumphs in Kent, means he is now Bray's closest challenger, up from third last month. The Van Diemen RF00/JL12 pilot is on 18 wins but could have made it into the 20s if he had

not erred in his early Hayes bouts.

Smyth is not the sole FF1600 exponent in the top 10 now, either. Callum Grant won the Historic Final at Brands Hatch and came within a whisker of Janet Cesar glory at Silverstone, both at the wheel of his Van Diemen RF91. Nevertheless, he is now 10th on the leaderboard, having not even been in the top 50 at the time of last month's update.

Elsewhere, Bray is not the only Mazda driver notching up the wins as three further successes for Aidan Hills in a Mk3 MX-5 at Silverstone have lifted him from seventh to fourth. Others on the march in recent weeks include Mark Smith, who joins Hills on 15 wins for the year having guided his GT3 McLaren to a quadruple success at Snetterton's GT Cup finale. Completing the improvers inside the top 10 is BMW racer Matthew Highcock, who has leapt from 10th to eighth.

For weekly top-50 tables, head to [autosport.com/national](https://www.autosport.com/national)

NATIONAL RANKINGS

LEADERBOARD

Correct as of 5 November

POS	DRIVER (CAR)	OVERALL WINS	CLASS WINS	TOTAL
1	Ali Bray (Mazda MX-5 Mk1)	23	0	23
2	Jason Smyth (Van Diemen RF00/JL12)	18	0	18
3	George Line (Dallara F308)	15	0	15
4	Aidan Hills (Mazda MX-5 Mk3)	15	0	15
5	Mark Smith (McLaren 720S GT3)	15	0	15
6	Simon Allaway (Lotus Esprit V8)	14	0	14
7	Jonathan Moore (Porsche 718 Cayman GT4 Clubsport)	0	14	14
8	Matthew Highcock (BMW 120i/BMW 116i)	13	0	13
9	Marcus Littlewood (Radical SR3 XXR)	13	0	13
10	Callum Grant (Merlyn Mk5/7/Van Diemen RF91/Merlyn Mk20A)	9	4	13

Note: All car races in UK and Ireland are included except qualification/repechage, consolation and handicap races. No races in other countries. Class wins are only counted when there are at least six starters in the class, except: when the race is part of a multi-stage event where six or more have taken part in earlier heats that feed into a semi-final or final; when multiple championships are merged in the same race, the 'overall' winner from the slower championship

can count a class win as long as that championship has at least 10 starters across all classes. Only classes divided by car characteristics are included, not those divided by driver characteristics such as ability, professional status, age, experience (for example rookie or pro-am classes). Each race counts only once, so an overall winner's class win is not added. Where there is a tie, overall wins take precedence. Where there is still a tie, average grid size for a driver's wins determines the order.



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INSIDER

Stephen Lickorish on the Walter Hayes Trophy's enduring appeal

Any event that can attract 103 drivers to a cold and windy Silverstone in November is clearly pretty popular. And it's brilliant that the thrilling final of the 25th edition of the Walter Hayes Trophy ensured that the anniversary was celebrated in style.

The event has progressed a long way from its humble beginnings as a single historic contest as part of the Silverstone Festival in 2001. It has become a national racing institution attracting hardy drivers and spectators to Northamptonshire year after year. Not that its creator James Beckett had any idea what the Hayes would turn into from that very first event. "When you create a race, you hope you will create something people enjoy," he says. "It quickly turned into a knockout format and grew from there. A huge amount of effort goes into it, and we have great support from everyone: Silverstone, the Historic Sports Car Club, Colin and Freddie [Beckett's brother and son]. I'm thrilled that it was a classic. We had over 100 cars, Formula Ford is still popular, and the Walter Hayes Trophy just brings people together. It's an international spectacle and a great way to finish the national racing season."

What makes this year's 103-car entry (and the 84 at the Formula Ford Festival the previous week) so impressive amid challenging economic times is the fact that FF1600 racing's relevance to the wider motorsport world has dwindled over the past quarter of a century. No longer is it *the* crucial starting point on the ladder to single-seater stardom. The halo-less cars with their stick-shift gearboxes and limited aero may still be brilliant training tools, but they have become ever less relevant to the machines that drivers encounter further along the ladder. That may have contributed to the demise of the National Formula Ford championship a couple of years ago, but the Hayes remains as adored as ever.

Take Andrew Rackstraw as a good example. The South

African is an enthusiastic character at the best of times, but his passion for the Hayes and Formula Ford racing is undeniable even while the Porsche Carrera Cup GB champion attempts to embark on a paid sportscar racing career. "I've had to work so hard to get the Porsche championship, so it's nice to come here with some old friends and have a fun weekend," he enthuses. "I will be back next year, and I want to do this for the rest of my life!"

While Rackstraw is still yet to taste overall glory, one driver who knows all about that is Joey Foster. His first Hayes triumph came in 2003 (the year the knockout format was adopted) and he's remained a fixture of the event ever since, adding three further wins. His 2025 attempt ended in semi-final disappointment, but Foster was quick to quash retirement rumours. While he may take a break to focus on work commitments, he is determined to achieve more Silverstone success. "Where else can you go racing with this level of competition and have so much fun?" says Foster, who feels he has unfinished business. "I will be back."

Speaking of returns, respective 2016 and 2019 winners Niall Murray and Jordan Dempsey were back among the entry. The event often clashes with the Mondello Park Fiesta endurance race in which Murray fields cars, but that very different contest is a week later this year, so he was free to compete – and very nearly took a second win. "It's the first time I've done it since 2017 and the racing is still close," he says. "There's so many potential frontrunners. Last weekend [the Festival] was really down to me and Jason [Smyth] on pace, with Jordan – there were three or four people. Here it's 10 people [with a genuine shot]."

Dempsey's race also ended in disappointment, but he relished the battle. "That was probably the best final there's been for a long time, it's the best Formula Ford racing in the world," he states. "I will have to come back."

The historic finals were entertaining contests as well,

"No longer is it the crucial starting point on the ladder to single-seater stardom"

while even the sun made an unusual appearance during this year's special event. And there was a fitting send-off for renowned commentator Ian Titchmarsh, who was presented with an award from Silverstone's Stuart Pringle having officiated over the podium before hanging up his microphone after 50 years.

The one thing missing? The BRDC Grandstand. The atmosphere there is always brilliant at the Hayes as the partisan cheer on their favourites. Refurbishment work meant it was closed this time, so its reopening next year is something to look forward to. After all, the view it provides of exciting wheel-to-wheel racing is the embodiment of why this event remains so popular after 25 years. 🏁



P140 HAYES REPORT AND HIGHLIGHTS

NATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MONTH

From new contests to one celebrating its 75th edition, there was still plenty happening in recent weeks despite the season entering its final stages



HISTORIC FINALS ENTERTAIN AT HAYES

Callum Grant narrowly missed out on achieving double success at the Formula Ford Festival and Walter Hayes Trophy. While Grant dominated the Historic Final in Kent, the Van Diemen RF91 driver was pipped to Janet Cesar Trophy spoils at Silverstone by James Clarke's RF90 (77) by just 0.071 seconds after a close contest.

The Carl Hamer Trophy final was also a thriller, with Crossle 35F pilot Mark McKenna profiting on a last-lap Brooklands clash between Benn Simms (Jomo) and Joe Ahrens (Royale) to win.

CONSISTENCY RULES IN GINETTA JUNIOR

Jesse Phillips emerged as Ginetta Junior Winter Series champion after his R Racing team-mates and title rivals Lewis Goff and Jarrett Clark fell victim to a multi-car incident in race three at Silverstone. Goff and Clark took a win each into the finale, Clark leading from pole before Goff battled through to the front, only to be sent wide by Colin Cronin and making contact as he rejoined. Clark had nowhere to go, hit Goff, and retired in the gravel a lap later. Goff, meanwhile, dropped to 14th, leaving fourth-placed Phillips to prevail by one point.





MOTION FORWARD IN BIRKETT RELAY

Run annually since 1951, the Birkett Six Hour Relay is a 750 Motor Club institution. This year's 75th edition featured 67 teams in cars from a standard Mazda 2 to Ariel Nomad buggy.

The handicap result carries great kudos, based on distance covered, with extra credit laps carefully calculated. Motion Motorsport, comprising Wayne Lawson and James Pickford in the former's hand-controlled Audi RS3 TCR (left), plus Travis Paterson, Will Puttergill, Ethian Symonds and Chris Nylan (Honda Civic EP3s) completed 137 laps, plus 14 bonuses. Hair We Go's Caterham 420R quartet Fergus Ryan, David Baldwin, Andrew McMillan and Gary Tootell reached the same total.

Radical team The 3Js – John Macleod, James Pinkerton and Joe Stables – claimed scratch gold, Macleod for the fourth successive year and seventh time in all.



CREIGHTON FLIES TO BRC TITLE ON CAMBRIAN

Fourth on the Cambrian Rally decider for William Creighton secured him British Rally Championship glory. The 2023 Junior World Rally champion sealed the spoils in his Toyota GR Yaris Rally2 after a consistent campaign. The event was won by Max McRae's Skoda Fabia.



WILLMOTTS ENJOY MRL'S GENERATION GAME

Rick and Joe Willmott won Motor Racing Legends' first Generations Trophy contest at Silverstone as 20 teams did battle in 1960s MGBs. The new series required two generations of the same family to share, with differing minimum pitstop times based on their combined age.



Jewiss/Dawson Mercedes
took surprise British GT title

HOW THE NATIONAL RACING CHAMPIONS WERE CROWNED

There were some dominant displays for drivers in the top UK series this year, while other battles went right down to the wire. Here are the stories of the season

ED HARDY, STEPHEN LICKORISH & STEVE WHITFIELD

2 SEAS RULES THE BRITISH GT3 WAVES

Considering there were four cars in mathematical contention for the British GT title on the final day, the 2025 campaign was actually fairly one-sided. Charles Dawson and Kiern Jewiss were crowned overall champions for the first time with the 2 Seas Mercedes squad, which won all but four races to also seal teams' spoils.

But, ahead of the season, not many would have predicted that outcome. Jewiss was set for his series debut after a 2024 sabbatical, while Dawson was stepping up to GT3 as reigning British GT4 pro-am champion.

Not much was expected, Dawson assumed it would be a "learning year" and outsiders instead focused on crews with

a factory driver. That all went out of the window after qualifying at the Donington Park opener though, as the Merc pair stormed to pole, with Dawson topping the amateur session by seven tenths.

Victory was theirs the following day and paddock grumblings started, pointing out this was a silver-bronze pairing per the FIA gradings, and such a duo doesn't often challenge for wins against crews that boast a professional with a gold or platinum licence.

The #42 Mercedes was thus given 30kg of extra ballast for round two at Silverstone after exceeding expectations. "We started off with an absolute bang, probably too much of



a bang," says Dawson, who then claimed the pair was "rocked" by the added weight.

That was evident in qualifying at Silverstone as they only mustered seventh. But, due to a stop-start contest where strategy was king, Dawson/Jewiss took second and scored maximum points.

The added weight was reduced to 25kg from round three, but the pair still felt aggrieved and a three-race podium-less streak brought others into play. Giacomo Petrobelli/Jonny Adam

(Blackthorn Aston Martin), Kevin Tse/Maximilian Gotz (2 Seas Mercedes) and Morgan Tillbrook/Marvin Kirchhofer (Optimum McLaren) were all now in with a shout of glory.

But Dawson/Jewiss (above) suddenly got their act together again for the next three races, as two victories gave them a 28.5-36.5-point cushion over the three rival crews heading into the Donington finale, where 37.5 were available. Dawson/Jewiss finished fourth that day, resulting in their crowning moment.

NINOVIC IS WIZARD OF GB3'S OZ PACK

Alex Ninovic became one of GB3's most dominant champions as the series entered a new era in 2025. The Rodin driver tamed the radical new Tatuus MSV GB3-025 car better than the rest, his record-equalling 10 poles and nine victories helping him wrap up the title with a round to spare.

Such superiority hadn't looked likely at round one, where the Australian racer made a low-key start and Freddie Slater – contesting a partial campaign for Hillspeed – enjoyed a huge advantage.

Ninovic took a win at each of the next three events to lead the standings when the season reached its halfway point in

Hungary, and from there he was almost untouchable. Across his next 10 starts he took six more victories, and even the returning Slater had no answer to his pace at Brands Hatch.

"I knew he had something special," says Rodin's GB3 team manager Ricky Taylor. "It all came [together] in Hungary, and since then he took off. He's the complete package: very strong-minded, very calm."

Ninovic will remain at Rodin in 2026 for a sideways move to Formula Regional Europe. "I wasn't expecting [this] level of performance," he admits. "I thought we would be at the front based on testing. I put it down to the training I did, not



feeling too pressured and just going out and doing my best."

In contrast, it proved a tough graduation for last year's British F4 dominator Deagen Fairclough. A chassis issue at Silverstone and a qualifying incident at Spa left the Hitech driver on the back foot, but he also struggled to adapt to the handling traits of the new car. He ended strongly with his first win at Monza, but was pipped to runner-up in the table by

Patrick Heuzenroeder, who also scored a solitary triumph for series debutant Xcel.

Ninovic's team-mates had contrasting fortunes. Gianmarco Pradel missed out on making it an all-Australian top three, while Abbi Pulling was unable to replicate the form that enabled her to outqualify Ninovic on her GB3 bow. A maiden podium at Brands helped her climb into the top 10 by the season's end.

Even Formula Regional ace Slater had no answer to Ninovic at Brands



SCAN ME



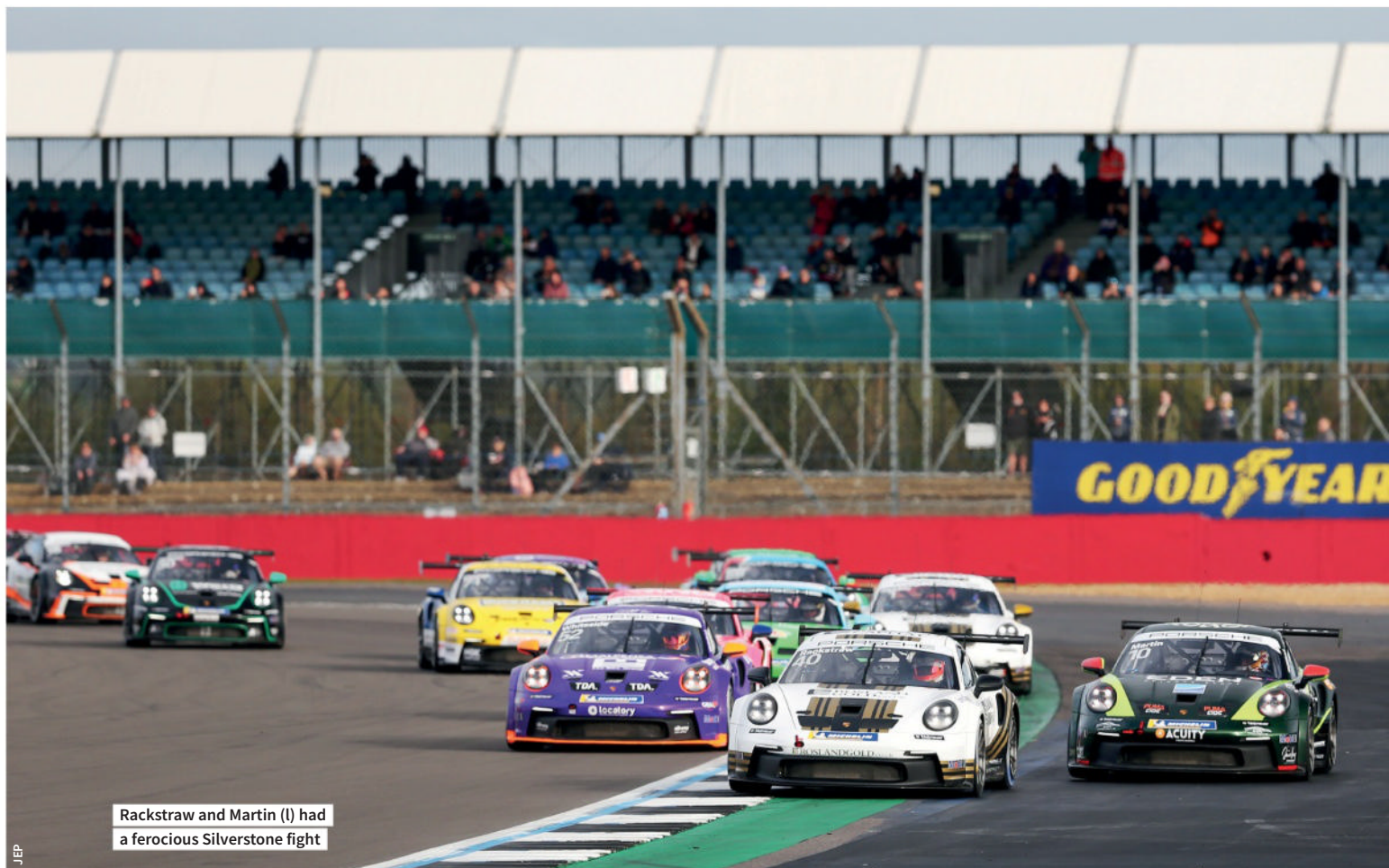
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Rackstraw and Martin (l) had a ferocious Silverstone fight

JEP

ANOTHER CLOSE CARRERA CUP FINALE

Any championship where the top pair are separated by just two points was clearly an interesting one. And this year's Porsche Carrera Cup GB title battle certainly featured constant twists and turns.

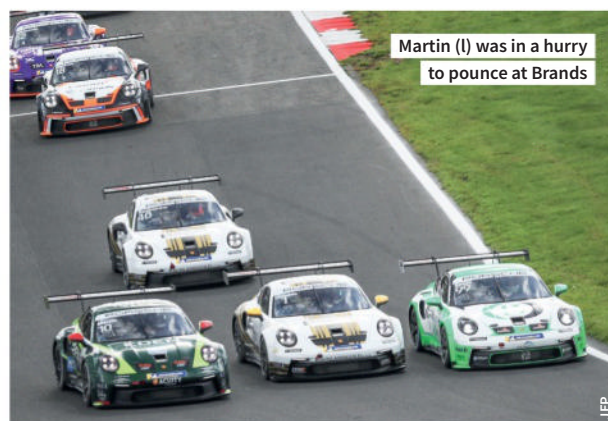
Last year's decider was a four-way thriller but, from mid-season, it was evident it would be a two-horse race this time. George Gamble's title defence never really got going, his Century team-mate Angus Whiteside's early points lead proved brief and Porsche GB Junior James Wallis (JTR) was unable to push on from scoring his first win in the category's 400th race at Snetterton. That just left Andrew Rackstraw and Will Martin, who trod different

paths to the showdown.

Martin (Eden Motorsport) was the perennial frontrunner eager to avenge his defeat 12 months ago when he spun out at the finale. Rackstraw, in contrast, grew up in South Africa but "left everything behind" to move to the other side of the world to compete in Porsches and Formula Ford last year. He joined Century this term, determined to improve upon eighth in 2024.

"I spent my first year learning the car, how to drive it and what makes it fast," Rackstraw explains. "Second year we focused on consistency."

The Donington Park curtain-raiser gave a taste of what was in store. Martin dominated the



Martin (l) was in a hurry to pounce at Brands

JEP

opener but clashed with Sid Smith in race two as Rackstraw prevailed. Rackstraw continued his point-scoring from there, while Martin endured further scrapes at Knockhill and Silverstone that left him with a 20-point deduction to his final total. A deduction that proved critical.

"To win a championship you do need a bit of luck," confesses Rackstraw. "Will definitely had the pace but those penalty points did bite him in the end

and that was something I was focused on. I knew I couldn't afford any 50/50 moves."

Having said that, there was some frantic battling between the protagonists at Silverstone and Brands Hatch, with Rackstraw's two fourths in Kent being just enough for him to prevail. "If I lost one or two positions, I may not have won – I think I've aged about 10 years, but I've loved it," admits the conqueror, who ensured it was another memorable campaign.



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There were plenty of twists in fight between Optimum (l) and Century

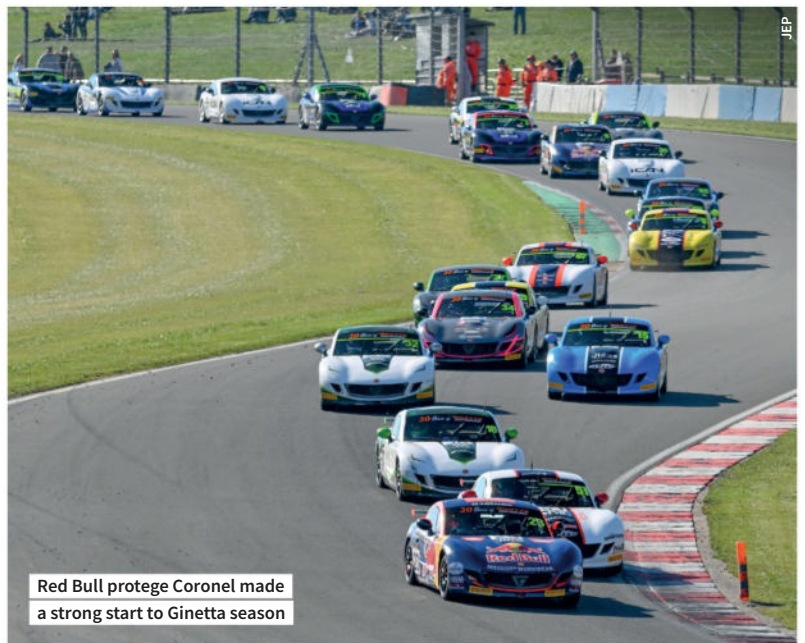
BROWN MAKES HISTORY WITH SECOND GT4 CROWN

The 2025 British GT4 campaign was one of domination between two crews, neither of which were actually the fastest in the class. Mahiki went quickest in three of the opening four qualifying sessions, but failed to collect any wins due to a series of operational or mechanical failures.

It even ditched its Lotus Emiras for Ginetta G56s for round four, but it was more of the same with four poles but no victories. Instead, the championship was fought between Marc Warren/Jack Brown (Optimum McLaren) and Ravi Ramyeed/Charlie Robertson (Century BMW) who, between them, won all-but one race.

The Optimum pair took first blood by triumphing in the Donington Park opener, before Ramyeed/Robertson struck back with Silverstone victory. It was then thought the title was practically sealed at the following Oulton Park event, as Warren/Brown won both races while their rivals failed to score due to a crash in the first contest that ended their weekend.

The McLaren pair consequently held a 50-point lead, but actually headed into the Donington finale behind. That's because Ramyeed/Robertson won two of the next three races after Oulton, before finishing second to Harry George/Luca Hopkinson (McLaren) at the penultimate Brands Hatch round. It was that weekend where Warren crashed out on lap one, yet all was forgotten when he and Brown won the finale to clinch the spoils, making Brown the first two-time GT4 champion.



Red Bull protege Coronel made a strong start to Ginetta season

DUTCH GINETTA JUNIOR WIN

Red Bull joined the Ginetta Junior grid for the first time in 2025 in collaboration with R Racing, and one of its drivers took the title in style.

Rocco Coronel, the latest protege of the energy drinks firm, was the class of the field. Seven straight early-season victories left the Dutch teenager with a huge lead and, after adding a further four triumphs, he took the title with two races to spare.

In a series known for close, elbows-out racing, Coronel's measured approach stood out, often coming from behind to

win with calm and calculated overtakes. In contrast, Red Bull's other junior Scott Kin Lindblom showed flashes of promise, but too often got caught up in incidents.

Fellow R Racing stablemate Alfie Slater, brother of 2023 champion Freddie, won the year's opening race, but was unable to reproduce that form often enough.

Instead, it was scholarship winner Fred Green who led the pursuit of Coronel for Elite Motorsport. He built on his solid start to the campaign with an impressive run of seven victories from the final nine races to finish second in the standings by a sizeable 215-point margin to the rest.

Bansal, Guinchard (49) and Phelps (35) had entertaining scrap for GB4 glory



BANSAL COMES FROM BEHIND FOR GB4 SUCCESS

GB4 boasted its biggest-ever grid in 2025, and it had a title battle to match. The introduction of the Tatuus MSV GB4-025 – a detuned version of GB3's old challenger – resulted in a record 25-car entry.

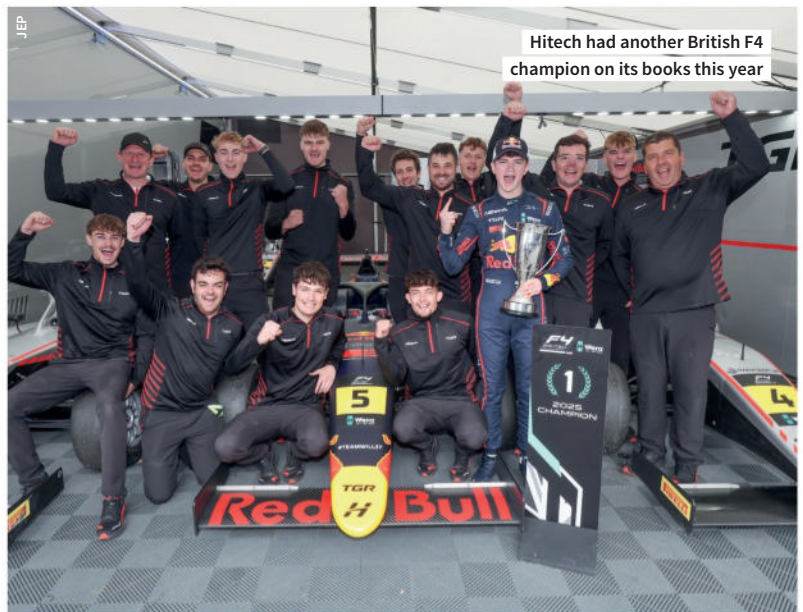
The competition at the front also proved more open than ever before, as Ary Bansal came from behind to snatch the crown at the Donington Park decider following a fight with his Elite team-mate Isaac Phelps and Hillspeed's Daniel Guinchard.

Former Mercedes junior Guinchard only won twice upon his return from 18 months on the sidelines, but a consistent campaign helped him lead the standings until the final round, only for things to cruelly unravel for him.

Scoring four victories each, Bansal and Phelps took points off each other across the year. Phelps had the better one-lap pace, and his fifth and six poles at the season finale put him within touching distance of glory. But an opening-lap collision with Guinchard in race one turned the championship on its head.

Bansal, meanwhile, believed his hopes were over after a difficult qualifying at Donington, but he took full advantage of his rivals' misfortune with three stirring comeback drives to seal the title.

The Indian racer believes his double victory halfway through the year at Snetterton was the turning point. "That was the best moment," he states. "I closed the gap to Guinchard and showed how good my pace was that weekend."



Hitech had another British F4 champion on its books this year

MCLAUGHLIN MASTERS F4

The motorsport world has become accustomed to seeing Red Bull-liveried machines dominating. But there was no guarantee its latest single-seater protege, car racing rookie Fionn McLaughlin, would add to that success considering this year's British Formula 4 entry was packed with stars of Ginetta Junior and sophomores eager to put their knowledge to use.

However, Irishman McLaughlin was not your typical rookie. As well as attracting Red Bull's support and finishing third in the pre-season Formula Winter Series, he was also 17 – a couple of years older

than many of his peers. "With his age, the maturity and the work ethic was there, which I think really helped him," says Hitech team manager Dominic Stott.

Yes, there was some inexperienced exuberance from McLaughlin on occasion, but his pace and racecraft were undeniable. He scored his first win at round three at Snetterton and grew in confidence, while key rival Martin Molnar (Virtuosi) appeared to succumb a tad to title-fighting pressure.

"Fionn will admit he made probably more mistakes than he wanted to but, when there were mistakes, he bounced back," adds Stott. "Winning as a rookie is no mean feat."



STING IN CAYMAN TAIL FOR PORSCHE CHAMP BRADSHAW

Of all the ways to miss out on a title, it would have been among the more embarrassing. Toro Verde driver Tom Bradshaw had been the class of the Porsche Sprint Challenge GB field for much of the year but a tough Silverstone event – which included a hefty startline shunt in the opener, where he was an innocent party – left him under a little more pressure than expected at the Brands Hatch finale.

The deciding contest should have been fairly straightforward for the experienced sportscar and historic racer: he simply needed to finish. But he managed to jump the start – although avoided a penalty because he was so far back in his grid box, he was able to stop his Cayman before rolling over the line – and then had a miserable ‘proper’ launch that left him being “walloped” into Paddock Hill Bend. Cue Bradshaw nursing a damaged car to the finish.

“It’s rare you ever get the perfect season,” admits Bradshaw, who was penalised for being a couple of inches over his grid box at Oulton Park. “I felt really calm and collected and the lights came on and I just had a momentary lapse and jumped the start. Luckily, my poor parking pulled me out of the mire.”

Bradshaw’s blunders were compounded by chief rival Joe Marshall having a belting weekend. The Team Parker racer won all three Brands bouts but ultimately ended up five points short of stealing Bradshaw’s glory.

Consistent scoring helped
Ovenden to Mini crown



OVENDEN BAKES MINI WIN

After two events, it seemed the destiny of the Mini Challenge title was only heading in one direction. Jamie Osborne crushed the opposition during those weekends to build a 64-point lead, having achieved five victories from six races. But motorsport is full of twists and turns and the NAPA driver failed to win again for the rest of the year.

Osborne was dealt some sizeable misfortune both on and off the track. Fuel system woes in qualifying at Oulton Park left him starting at the back and then he was forced onto the sidelines for the final two events on medical grounds.

All of this benefited Excl8r’s Tom Ovenden. The 2023 Cooper winner had trimmed Osborne’s advantage thanks to his metronomic point-scoring and picked up the pieces when his rival’s health scare intervened. But take nothing away from Ovenden, to score strong points in every race across a season in an unpredictable series like Mini Challenge is impressive.

“Going into Brands, people were saying, ‘You’ve got it’, but it’s very easy to say that,” reflects Ovenden. “Two weeks ahead, that [70-point] gap just kept getting smaller and smaller in my head.” Yet Ovenden kept his cool, helped by Osborne’s teammate Lewis Selby having a tough finale.



BABY BERTHA: A RACING ICON AT 50

Conceived by accident, Gerry Marshall's Vauxhall Firenza V8 Super Saloon, winner of 34 races from 1975-77, is growing old disgracefully

MARCUS PYE

The initials GM and GM became synonymous when Gerry Marshall and General Motors intertwined. The Hertfordshire motor trader started competing in a BMC Mini in 1964 and raced a works Ford Escort-BDA in the 1972 British Saloon Car Championship, having beaten Jody Scheckter to 1971's inaugural Mexico title. But Marshall's prowess in Vauxhalls – from mundane showroom stock cars to bespoke genetically

“Victories racked up in Viva GTs and Firenzas led to the formation of Dealer Team Vauxhall”

modified tyre fryers – put GM's European marque on the motorsporting map, earning legions of fans over 40 years.

Victories racked up in Viva GTs and Firenza coupes, often at the expense of Blue Oval rivals, empowered the formation of Dealer Team Vauxhall. This marketing coup saw agents' modest sporting budget contributions matched by the manufacturer, with

publicity generated by race and rally wins working for all. Marshall spearheaded the track action, driving steeds masterminded by UK-domiciled Dutchman Bill Blydenstein – the genial Borgward Isabella to Vauxhall VX4/90 racer whose hallowed tuning products transformed the latter's image – and a loyal crew headed by Gerry Johnstone.

Ex-Vauxhall factory man Johnstone was as passionate as Marshall about the Red Griffin emblem. As British club racing's popular Special Saloon category attracted ever-larger American V8-engined hybrids, championed by Mick Hill's omnipresent self-built Capris, Marshall's shrill Firenza upset the form book. In 1973, with 'Old Nail' stunningly presented in Thames Television's silver and royal blue livery, Marshall challenged Hill's new six-litre Capri-Chevrolet and vanquished Tony Hazlewood's DAF-Oldsmobile.

Vauxhall thus commissioned a big banger from Blydenstein's works at Shepreth, near Royston. The large Ventora FE was not, perhaps, the obvious choice, but Johnstone, Geoff Hall and Dick Waldo toiled away on the project. The finished machine –

with key input from aerodynamicist Frank Costin and GM styling guru John Taylor, a disciple of US-based chief Wayne Cherry – looked fabulous, more design concept than racer, when revealed to the press at The Hilton Hotel in London's Park Lane on 1 October 1973.

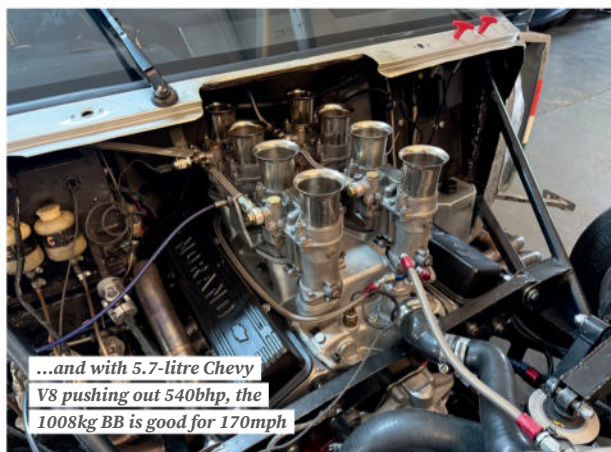
Powered by a Holden V8 from GM's Australian subsidiary, developed by Repco – Jack Brabham and Ron Tauranac's three-litre F1 engine partner from 1966 – and proven in Formula 5000 by Frank Matich (McLaren M10B) and Garrie Cooper's works Elfins, its 465bhp was transmitted by a Borg Warner T10 gearbox. Despite winning a Silverstone clubbie on its debut, Big Bertha, as the initially wayward monster became known, was fundamentally flawed. De Dion axle tube breakage at Snetterton and seat mounting collapse at Thruxton preceded further wins at Silverstone, Snetterton and Mallory Park, but a catastrophic front brake failure approaching Woodcote at Silverstone in August 1974 resulted in a heavy impact, from which Marshall was fortunate to escape injury. “The best thing that ever happened to that car >>

Baby Bertha at 50

GARY HAWKINS



Baby Bertha still has impressive track presence, even at 50...



...and with 5.7-litre Chevy V8 pushing out 540bhp, the 1008kg BB is good for 170mph



GARY HAWKINS

Blydenstein and Marshall were key to car's success

JEFF BLOXHAM



Marshall and BB chalked up 21 wins in 1975

JEFF BLOXHAM



Big Bertha was fast, but tricky and unreliable...

JEFF BLOXHAM



...and crashed, paving the way for something better...



...and Baby Bertha showed it was rapid from its first test

JEFF BLOXHAM

JEFF BLOXHAM



Alec Poole's Skoda was one of the few to get near Marshall

was it getting written-off,” he said in his biography *Only Here for the Beer*.

With greater attention to detail, its Firenza caricature successor incorporated the undamaged engine and gearbox but was a very different animal. Reliant on fewer production car underpinnings, a neater, lighter and more practical solution was evolved. Little of the smaller coupe was borrowed bar its side elevation, maybe only its window profile. While GM South Africa homologated a five-litre Firenza V8 as the Chevrolet Can-Am – 100 were built, plus a handful of racers – the Anglo-Australian one-off used the facelifted droop-snoot styling to embrace Vauxhall’s marketing plans. With a tubular central spine to its chassis and wide side pontoons brilliantly crafted by Rawlson’s Barry Sheppard to reflect Taylor’s cues, it looked more like a futuristic offshore powerboat, from chisel prow to open transom overhanging the fuel tank.

Boldly accentuated by Castrol’s red, white and green stripes, ‘Baby Bertha’ hit the track at Snetterton. Johnstone – a handy short oval stock car racer – shook it down before Marshall arrived. After Big Bertha, which he said was undriveable, this was a revelation. With Gerry aboard, the results were incredible. Sub-record in a couple of laps, he walloped it thereafter. As Johnstone said in his book *A History of Winning*, “it was something like eight seconds under the lap record!” Beaten only twice in straight fights over two seasons, Marshall loved to showboat, laying

“The best thing that ever happened to Big Bertha was it getting written-off”

rubber in full-blooded powerslides, so far were they ahead.

The combination did not win its debut race, driveshaft failure stopping Marshall on Brands Hatch’s club (Indy) circuit on 25 May 1975. But from Mondello Park in Ireland the following weekend Marshall and Baby Bertha started the ball rolling, winning both Tricentrol Super Saloon Championship heats. By the end

of the season they had notched 21 wins. Only urbane Irishman Alec Poole, in Derek McMahon’s two-litre Skoda-BDG S100R – designed by Ray Jessop around F2 Rondel running gear for Chris Meek – beat them all year, taking the chequer 4.8s clear on Oulton Park’s short Fosters Circuit in June.

“To be blunt, I could never understand why Vauxhall didn’t take on other manufacturers in the British Saloon Car Championship then, rather than take a sledgehammer to crack a nut,” reckons 1969 champion Poole. “If that sounds like sour grapes 50 years on it’s not meant to. Gerry could be a bit of a bully, but between us there was a lot of respect on and off track. The nimble Skoda handled well round there and its engine – built by Dick Bennetts [of West Surrey Racing fame] – was really good.” Having clawed past Nick Whiting’s Escort-FVC, then scrapped with Marshall, Alec and Gerry shared the lap record at 63.6s (93.82mph).

Marshall won the inaugural championship by a country mile, but thrashing the rest in the British Grand Prix support race at Silverstone, rather than making a race of it, did not help

the genre’s wider perception. “I should have finished closer,” says initial leader Poole, “but lost too much time battling with Nick Whiting and others. We only won once, but I like to think we were a thorn in their side.”

Not that Gerry was averse to gamesmanship. At the BARC’s Thruxton TV meeting in November he pitted from the lead, chatted with his crew and still won, while spectators at Boxing Day Brands were treated to Baby Bertha finishing a fighting fourth in a Formule Libre race. Your scribe was there, marshalling with mentor Bob Lentell, and memories of Marshall – who pipped Colin Hawker’s magnificent DFVW in the earlier Special Saloon race – scrapping with winner Val Musetti’s F2-spec March 75B, Richard Lloyd’s Lola T294 sportscar and John Wingfield’s F2 Ralt RT1, all BDG-powered, remain vivid. Combining open and closed-wheel cars was later outlawed by the RACMSA (now Motorsport UK).

Thruxton inspired the creation of the only other car to defeat the combo. “Watching Gerry coming out of the chicane in Baby Bertha was the most exciting thing I’d ever seen,” >>

LAT/GETTY IMAGES

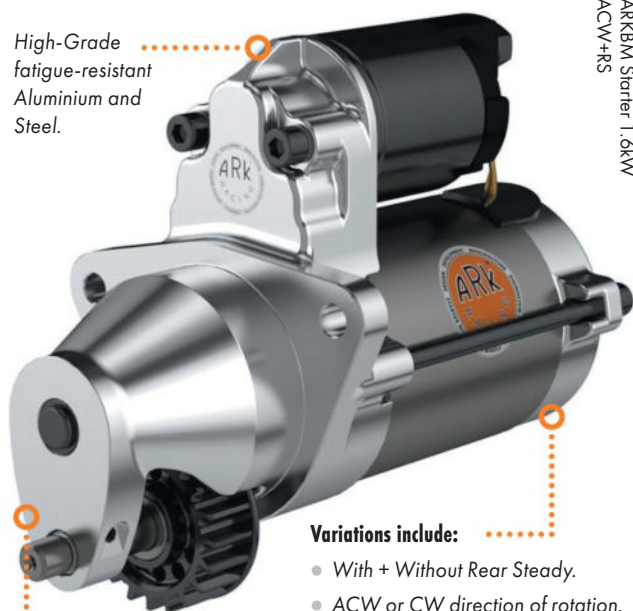


Marshall with Buncombe, one of only two drivers to beat the V8 monster



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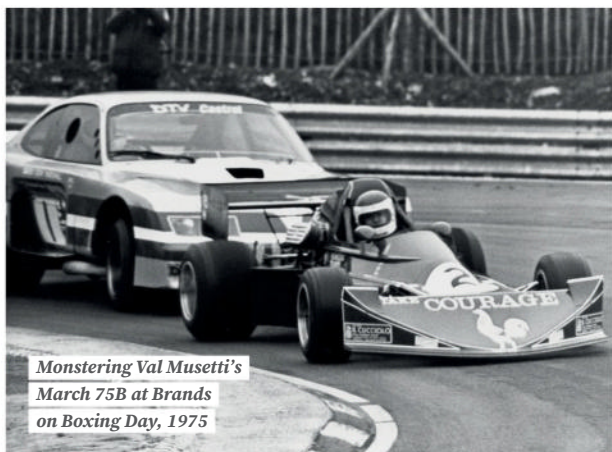
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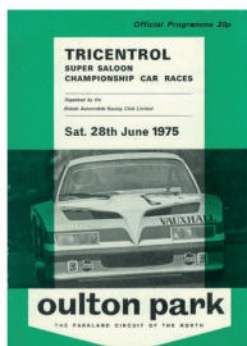
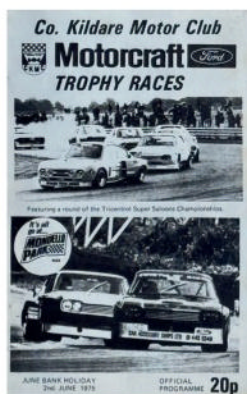


Monsterring Val Musetti's March 75B at Brands on Boxing Day, 1975

RAY GREEN

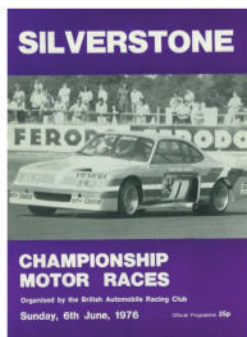


Livery change and natty trousers brought Paul H-H no luck



ROUND 4 - START 12.30 Hrs. approx.
15 LAP SCRATCH RACE FOR
TRICENTRAL SUPER SALOONS
(Qualifying in 1975: 100% Successive Lap Times)

No.	Driver	Car	Time	Driver	Car	Time
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BB had sprouted a huge wing by the time Barak raced it in 1981

THOMAS SALKELD

remembers Jonathan Buncombe. "My brother-in-law Tony Wadsworth had bought a Chevron B19/21 from Ian Bracey and a [rare surviving] Cosworth FVD engine. We had no money, so moulded a fibreglass Hillman Imp body from a road car to go over it. We built it for two and a half grand and debuted it at Thruxton [at the end of 1975]. It still had the Chevron rollcage, which did not comply with Special Saloon regulations, but we were allowed to race for no points by taking the front and rear screens out.

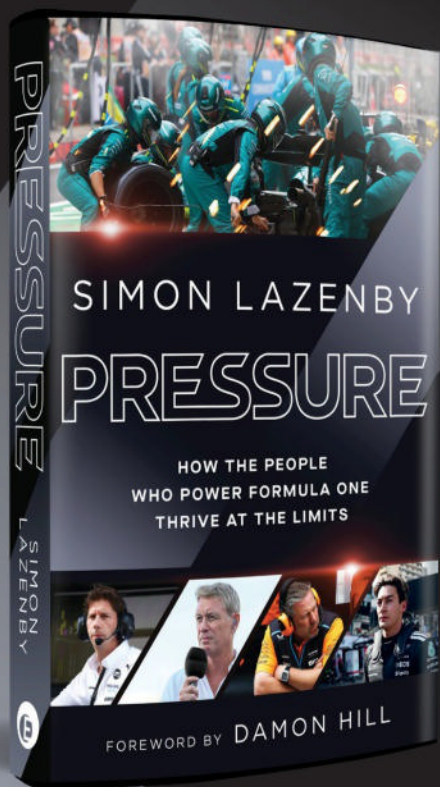
"I was amazed to find that Gerry and I had equal pole, but he set the time first. I was behind him when he spun at the chicane and thought, 'I'm going to win this', only to spin at Allard on old tyres that were like concrete...

"The 'Chimp's wing was controversial, but we took the car to RAC technical scrutineer Peter Jowitt in Farnborough. He declared it totally legal, signing it off. Second time out on Silverstone's GP circuit [the 1976 championship opener], I really made Gerry sweat and nipped past a couple of times under braking."

At Club on the last lap, Buncombe

went ahead and staved Marshall off for a rousing victory: "Then the s*** hit the fan. There was a protest [Whiting was nominated to put down the £5 fee], which we fended off with Jowitt's letter, but then it went legal. This was club racing, and a couple of Somerset boys with straw hanging out of their mouths had never seen a QC. We lost on a technicality and I only raced the car once more, without the wing bits, on Silverstone's Club circuit. It was undriveable and the gearbox broke. It was decided that the Imp's silhouette above the wheel centres was OK, but the [stretched] wheelbase was not."

Without Baby Bertha's unexpected opposition, tacitly welcome until it proved a game-changer, Marshall's silverwash continued and back-to-back Super Saloon crowns were secured. The writing was already on the wall, though. In 1975 the V8 running costs-to-reward ratio had refocused car-builders John Turner and Mick Hill – very capable drivers both – on F5000, leaving a one-horse race. While Irishman Arthur Collier in the ex-Turner Skoda-Chevrolet beat Gerry's Mondello lap record, few were enthused to become also-rans >>



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Joe Ward, Baby Bertha's proud custodian for 39 years, last saddled the old warhorse at Brands Hatch in August

GARY HAWKINS

against what was perceived to be a big-budget works effort.

Marshall and Baby Bertha competed occasionally in late 1977, but for 1979 a new, more liberally ruled silhouette category emerged: the Donington GT Championship. Cars such as the BMW M1 clones of local stalwart Hill and Geordie Jeff Wilson – built on the ex-Richard Scott/Bob Evans F5000 Durex Lola-Chevrolet T400 and

“When Vauxhall offered to pay to rebuild the engine, it came out of hibernation”

ex-David Purley Chevron-Ford GAA V6 B30 respectively – drew competitors and spectators to Tom Wheatcroft's superb new circuit.

Nottingham Imp graduate Paul Haywood-Halfpenny had acquired BB for £8500 in October 1977 and changed its livery to black and bronze, but it proved woefully unreliable. With the surviving Holden/Repco engine (of the pair supplied to DTV in 1973) replaced

by a more sustainable Chevrolet V8 it played cameo roles thereafter.

American car specialist Martin Dilks (DB Motors of Leicester) took it on next. He did not race Bertha, but – now plain white – Bruce Peers did once in July 1980, substituting for the programmed Graham Goode, who had driven it on a test day. “By then it had been to the moon and back,” says Goode. “It was horrendous. No way was I racing it.”

Gosforth's Phil Barak – now MSUK's oldest race licence holder at 91 – subsequently bought BB and raced it in white, then blue in the north from 1981 through 1983. When George ‘Welly’ Potter's Lotus Esprit-Chevrolet superseded it, Marshall took the Firenza back. Gerry raced his old girlfriend, silver once more, to second at Thruxton in November 1983.

Lincolnshire farmer Joe Ward – who had owned, but not raced, the ex-works CC Racing-built Vauxhall Carlton TS6000 – became Bertha's current custodian unexpectedly in 1986. “I'd started racing in Thundersaloons with the ex-Tony Lanfranchi Opel Monza in 1984, but

it wasn't anything like quick enough,” says Joe. “I converted it to V8 power at the end of 1985, but needed a stronger Muncie ‘Rock Crusher’ gearbox. I was told that Gerry had one, but he said I'd have to buy the car it was in. Bertha was in a state, had a ‘cooking’ 5.7 Chevrolet and did little for 14 years. When Vauxhall offered to pay for MASS to rebuild the engine, and a new set of BBS wheels, it came out of hibernation.”

Painstakingly prepared by Neil Howe, 14 miles from its birthplace, and with its cockpit workload transformed by electric power steering from a Vauxhall Corsa – “Gerry must have been bloody strong, but we kept the mods in the family,” says Ward, now 74 – BB has been used sparingly since the Classic Sports Car Club rekindled Special Saloons and Modsports racing's embers in 2011. Joe won at Silverstone in May 2012, and spread Bertha's fanbase to Phillip Island, Australia, in 2015. In May 2021, an inspired class-winning second at Donington, in Malcolm Harding's Escort's slipstream, proved there was still life in the old girl! ❄



Smyth (leading) took no prisoners in a very hard-fought Hayes final

STEVE JONES

WALTER HAYES TROPHY 2025 RESULTS

- 1 Jason Smyth**
Van Diemen RF00/JL12
(Team Dolan)
15m40.833s
- 2 Andrew Rackstraw**
Spectrum 011C
(KMR Sport)
+0.240s
- 3 KC Ensor Smith**
Spectrum 011C
(KMR Sport)
+1.192s

CARL HAMER TROPHY
Mark McKenna (Crossle 35F)

JANET CESAR TROPHY
James Clarke (Van Diemen RF91)

WALTER HAYES TROPHY

NO UNLUCKY 13 FOR SMYTH AS HE WINS THRILLER

Starting 13th proved anything but unlucky for Jason Smyth as the Team Dolan driver surged through the field to win one of the most entertaining finals in the Walter Hayes Trophy's 25-year history.

Yet, despite his ultimate success, there was a time when it looked like Smyth might not even contest the final. There was a noticeable gap in the assembly area on the seventh row where his Van Diemen RF00/JL12 was due to be amid anger over a grid penalty from a chaotic semi-final that resulted in his lowly starting position. Smyth was sanctioned for a coming together out of Brooklands as he, last year's winner Rory Smith and Anthony Amato attempted to run three-abreast. Smyth was in the middle and judged at fault, hence the 10-place penalty.

Eventually, however, his machine did appear in the collection area, and boy was he glad he decided to give it a go in the end... "After making those mistakes in the heats and the semi, when I should have won both really, and then getting a penalty and Dad [2006 podium finisher Neville] storming out saying, 'We're not doing the final!' – it's like a story tale," he said. "Going out there, I was just in demon mode. I was like, 'If I have a huge accident, I have a huge accident, I'm going for that win no matter what.'"

That demonic driving was evident from the very start. Smyth was certainly not biding his time and threw caution to the wind to climb six places on the opening lap alone. By the end of the third of the 15 tours, he was up to fourth. The next lap he picked off Jordan Dempsey (B-M

Racing Medina) on the inside at Becketts before braving it around the outside of Andrew Rackstraw (KMR Spectrum) at Brooklands. That just left the small matter of Smyth's team-mate, 2016 winner Niall Murray, back for his first crack at the Hayes in eight years.

Murray had got the jump on polesitter Rackstraw at the start, but it was not long before Smyth was running side by side with him. Murray held off Smyth for a lap but, amid a problem with his Van Diemen BD26 that momentarily restricted his speed out of corners, he was unable to stop the inevitable pass at Becketts. In just six laps Smyth had gone from 13th to first.

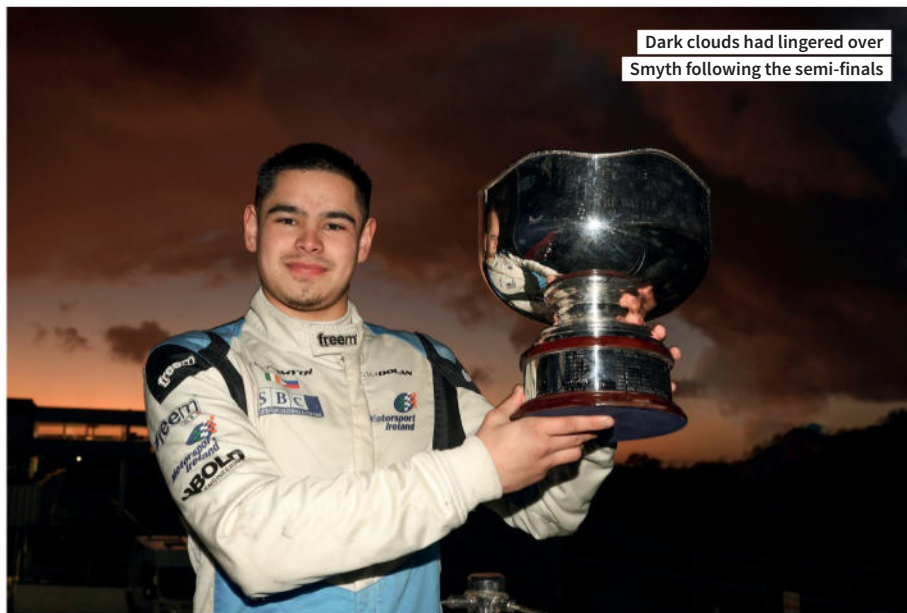
But that was not the end of the story. Murray retaliated a couple of tours later and briefly edged back ahead, but it was Dempsey who was the greater threat. The 2019 winner was also fired up after an earlier sanction, this time track-limits penalties that meant his brilliant pass on Murray around the outside at Brooklands to seemingly snatch heat-three glory counted for nothing.

He dispatched Murray more easily this time and then began challenging Smyth. There were a few attempts around the outside of Brooklands and then, on the final lap, came a desperate dive from miles back on the inside. There was inevitably contact, which sent Dempsey spinning back to 10th. "I had to go for it!" he admitted. "I knew it probably wasn't



Grid penalty for this semi-final clash threatened to derail Smyth's event

STEVE JONES



Dark clouds had lingered over
Smyth following the semi-finals

going to pay off, but I had to try something.”

But, while Dempsey was left wondering what might have been, Smyth’s momentum was not halted by the contact, and he just about held on to take a remarkable win. “It was an unbelievable drive,” enthused the winner. “I just made the right calls every single time. And then all the defending and I didn’t even know it was the last lap. I didn’t know Jordan was up the inside until he hit me!”

Murray crossed the line second but was the victim of track-limits penalties and therefore tumbled back to 15th on a weekend where he was looking impressive. “From lap four I knew I wasn’t going to have a chance – the issue was even worse,” he reflected on the car woes. “But I think it was the best I’ve driven in years.”

This meant recently crowned Porsche Carrera Cup GB champion Rackstraw was runner-up, repeating his result from last year. The late drama and penalties meant there were two KMR South Africans on the podium as KC Ensor Smith progressed to third, having earlier tangled with Ayrton Houk in the chaotic fourth heat.

“This event’s a bit of a lottery,” said Rackstraw. “It just went his [Smyth’s] way in the final but it was a lot of fun. To roll out these cars for the first time this year and get two on the podium is great.”

Also in strife on the final lap were Jacob Tofts (KMR Spectrum) and Tom Nippers (Van Diemen RF01), who collided at Becketts, and this meant Luke Cooper was promoted to fourth in his Swift SC20, again just missing out on that elusive WHT rostrum. The top six was then completed by Jordan Kelly (Dolan Van Diemen RF06) and Hugh Esterson (Ammonite Ray GR18).

The lead 12 cars circulated as one for much of

the enthralling race, which did not feature any cautions, but several expected frontrunners were not among that group come the finish. This included Smith, whose B-M Medina crossed the line seventh in the final – before receiving a deluge of track-limits punishments – as the consequence of the semi-final clash with his namesake that left him even further back on the grid. He was still able to participate in the final, unlike some other key contenders who were eliminated in the hard-fought semis.

Four-time event winner Joey Foster admitted to making a poor start on the still-wet side of the grid and, as he attempted to capitalise upon a squabble between Megan Gilkes and Cooper by going around the outside of Luffield, his Firman was tagged by Gilkes and his event was over.

Also out of the running was Michael Eastwell, who was again immediately on the pace on his sole annual race outing with KMR. But he was the victim of an aggressive Kelly out of Luffield and was also relegated to a spectator for the final.

As much as he would have wanted to be part of it, he was at least treated to a stunning spectacle as Smyth emphatically demonstrated that he is the top Formula Ford driver of 2025. His Hayes success followed Festival glory (see right) and he also claimed the United Formula Ford title. “To take the clean sweep is just unreal,” concluded Smyth, who is now seeking sponsorship to progress his career. “Winning in dominant force [in the Festival] and then having to work for it in that final, it just shows I need sponsors to get up there.”

And he also showed that, wherever you start for the final, you can still be in with a shout.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

SMYTH EMULATES HIS FATHER WITH FESTIVAL WIN

Jason Smyth’s Formula Ford Festival glory was a little more straightforward than his Hayes success as, 15 years after witnessing his father win the FF1600 section of the Festival, he became the first second-generation winner in Brands Hatch’s 50th edition of the event.

The United Formula Ford champion won his heat, semi-final and the final, where he was followed home by fellow Irishmen Jordan Dempsey and Niall Murray. Smyth was never headed as he converted pole into the lead and set a blistering pace in his Van Diemen RF00/JL12. Without the aid of a tow, Smyth was the only driver to dip under a 50-second lap in a race, making light of two safety-car periods to win by 2s.

“I was really, really pushing it,” admitted Smyth, “which I probably shouldn’t have been with the lead I had! I knew nobody was able to match me.”

Dempsey jumped semi-final winner Tom Nippers at the start and just held off Smyth’s team-mate Murray by 0.15s at the flag. Dempsey had shadowed Smyth in both heat and semi-final – after Smyth survived first-lap contact with two-time winner Rory Smith – but could not match him in the final.

Murray, also a two-time victor, dominated his heat but made a slow getaway in his semi. He could only finish third after a skirmish with Nippers, leaving him with too much to do from sixth on the final grid. Another driver seeking a third Festival win, Joey Foster, was eliminated from his semi-final when his Firman was hit in a first-lap pile-up.

MARK PAULSON



Smyth streaked clear
from the Festival pack

GARY HAWKINS

MEMORABLE WALTER HAYES TROPHY MOMENTS

The start of November means one thing in national motorsport and, in celebration of 25 years of the WHT, here is just a small selection of the event's notable performances

STEPHEN LICKORISH



FOSTER'S FIRST WIN AS EVENT GROWS

The 2003 edition of the Walter Hayes Trophy was a significant one. It was when the seeds for the Formula Ford extravaganza it has now become were really sown as the knockout format of today was first adopted to coincide with the event growing from merely being an historic contest. And that year also marked the first win for a driver who has been a huge part of the WHT story: Joey Foster (left).

Considering Foster was at the wheel of an ageing Reynard 92FF, and he dropped to last in his heat after contact with Matt Rivett, the way he dominated the wet final was some turnaround. "Quite amazing, but good fun, despite the difficult conditions," was the modest summary of the likeable Cornishman.

A marker was laid, however. It was the first of three consecutive wins for Foster, and he then cemented his place as the event's greatest with further success in 2022.

JEFF BLOXHAM

WATTS AMONG THE PASS MASTERS

There have been plenty of incredible drives from the back throughout the Walter Hayes Trophy's 25 years. And one of the most notable must be Danny Watts's second place in 2004 (right).

The British F3 frontrunner only took part on the Sunday of the event and therefore started at the rear of the Last Chance race on his category debut in a borrowed Mygale, but shot through to finish as a distant runner-up to Foster in the final.

Ian Gough (2006) and two-time winner Michael Moyers (2019) are two others to have produced memorable climbs through the order, but perhaps the driver to have made the most places in a weekend was Roger Orgee (inset) in 2015. Driveshaft woes prevented him from starting his heat, yet he went on to finish fifth in the final having gained a colossal 97 places!



JEFF BLOXHAM

JEP



CUNNINGHAM'S STUNNING PERFORMANCE

Considering the late Neil Cunningham was a favourite of Walter Hayes Trophy guru James Beckett, it only seems appropriate for the popular Kiwi to be a part of this list. But Cunningham is more than deserving of a mention, thanks to his heroics in 2005.

Bearing in mind Cunningham's ability, it's not a surprise that he was among the heat winners. But what makes it so notable was that it came at the wheel of a venerable Van Diemen RF78 – christened 'Black Beauty' and owned by Beckett. Cunningham's sideways antics even attracted race control's attention, with the clerk of the course issuing a tongue-in-cheek bulletin telling him to "stop acting like a Kiwi superstar"! Sadly, Cunningham's efforts came to naught in the final when he slithered off.



DEMPSEY IS HERO AND ZERO

Peter Dempsey made countless Walter Hayes Trophy headlines over the years. Like or loathe his aggressive style, his undeniable talent and impact cannot be discounted. The high point perhaps came in 2007 (above) when the Irishman made a sublime triple pass – on 2002 victor Gavin Wills, 2006 runner-up Neville Smyth and rising star James Nash, no less – at Brooklands to score the second of his three wins.

However, later years were marred by high-profile clashes, including with Foster in 2012 and with Moyers and Scott Malvern in 2014. After a further tangle with Kevin O'Hara in 2015, Dempsey was excluded from the final for failing to wear a suitable HANS device and vowed to never return. It was a disappointing end for one of the event's key characters.

THE WALTER HAYES TROPHY WINNERS

2001	Neil Fowler	Lola T200
2002	Gavin Wills	Swift SC92F
2003	Joey Foster	Reynard 92FF
2004	Joey Foster	Reynard 89FF
2005	Joey Foster	Reynard 89FF
2006	Peter Dempsey	Ray GRS06
2007	Peter Dempsey	Ray GRS07
2008	Conor Daly	Ray GRS08
2009	Connor e Phillippi	Ray GRS08
2010	Peter Dempsey	Ray GRS09
2011	Adrian Campfield	Spectrum 011C
2012	Tristan Nunez	Ray GRS07/08
2013	Scott Malvern	Spectrum 011C
2014	Wayne Boyd	Van Diemen MS13
2015	Graham Carroll	Van Diemen JL13
2016	Niall Murray	Van Diemen RF99
2017	Michael Moyers	Spectrum 011C
2018	Michael Moyers	Spectrum 011C
2019	Jordan Dempsey	Spectrum 011C
2020	Oliver White	Medina JL17
2021	Max Esterson	Ray GR18
2022	Joey Foster	Firman RFR20
2023	Chris Middlehurst	Van Diemen LA10
2024	Rory Smith	Medina Sport JL18



TURNER'S FEELGOOD RETURN

The 2020 Walter Hayes Trophy was remembered for all the wrong reasons. The atmosphere was already subdued amid the coronavirus restrictions and then came a frightening pile-up on the pitstraight in terrible conditions during the Last Chance race. Colin Turner was left with the worst injuries and required the amputation of both of his legs.

But it is a clear sign of Turner's character that this did not represent the end of his WHT journey. Completing demo laps two years later was special enough, but the remarkable Scot actually raced in the Hayes itself in 2023 in a Merlyn Mk20A. The 73-year-old was not a frontrunner, but that was not the point – it was a wonderful feelgood story. "It means a lot because these are the people that looked after me," he said.

FINISHING STRAIGHT

GT World Cup

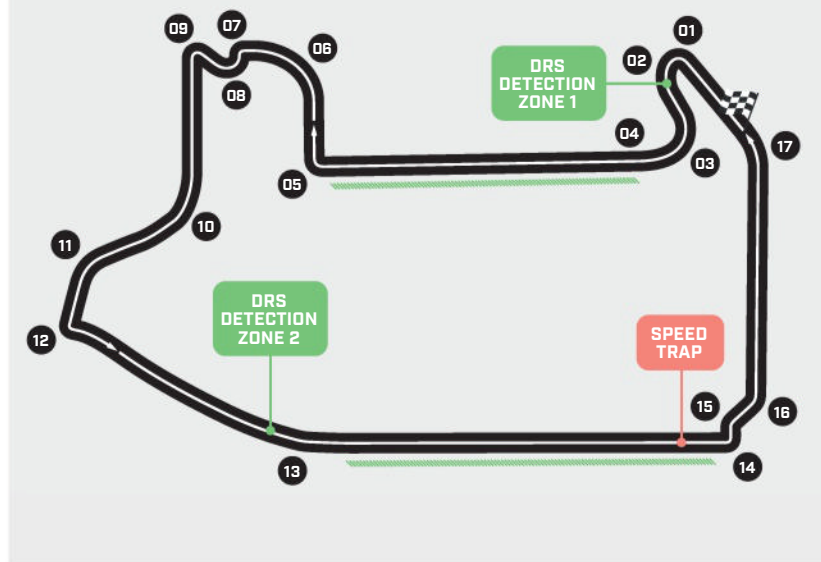
The FIA's GT World Cup has become an integral part of the Macau Grand Prix festival. Who will win in 2025?



LAS VEGAS GP



F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 22



RACE DATA

Venue	Las Vegas Strip Circuit
First GP	2023
GPs held	2
Circuit length	3.853 miles
Number of laps	50
Race distance	192.656 miles
Race lap record	1m34.876s Lando Norris (2024)
Pole lap record	1m32.312s George Russell (2024)
Most wins	Max Verstappen & George Russell 1
Most poles	Charles Leclerc & George Russell 1
Most starts	18 drivers 2

TIMETABLE (UK TIME)

Friday 21 November

Practice 1	0030-0130
Practice 2	0400-0500

Saturday 22 November

Practice 3	0030-0130
Qualifying	0400-0500

Sunday 23 November

Race	0400
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WHERE TO WATCH

Live coverage	Sky Sports F1
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WHO WILL FIND HEAVEN IN LAS VEGAS?

Las Vegas presents the most telling example of how much F1 has grown across the past 40-odd years, particularly in the US. Today, 20 cars do battle down the Strip, right next to the venue of the championship's brief flirtation with the city back in the 1980s. The Caesars Palace car park that inexplicably held two F1 grands prix has been built over, but the memory of its small size does pale in comparison to the expanse of road used for today's Las Vegas sojourn.

With the race held late at night to accentuate the City of Sin's neon-tinged

glow, the desert's precipitous drop in temperature means that 13-14C is the norm – still nonetheless warmer than the UK's winter breeze. Cold temperatures tend to produce low-grip conditions and the drivers expend great deals of effort trying to get the tyres to switch on; for any teams that can manage that organically, it's half the battle won.

George Russell's victory last year and Mercedes' similar form in cooler, low-grip conditions does suggest that the smart money is on the Silver Arrows, but who knows how the roulette wheel will spin?



LAT/GETTY IMAGES

PREVIOUS WINNERS

2024	George Russell	Mercedes (below)
2023	Max Verstappen	Red Bull
1982	Michele Alboreto	Tyrrell
1981	Alan Jones	Williams



KUPPENS/CON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES



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- Prepare, maintain, and service F4 cars to the highest standards before, during, and after race events.
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- Support the team at race meetings, test days, and workshops both in the UK and across Europe.
- Ensure all work is carried out with precision, efficiency, and attention to detail under time-sensitive conditions.
- Adhere to health, safety, and compliance standards at all times.

Requirements:

- Proven motorsport mechanic experience, ideally within single seater or similar racing categories.
- Strong teamwork and communication skills.
- Ability and willingness to travel extensively across the UK and Europe.
- Capable of working efficiently under pressure in a fast-paced, competitive environment.

Benefits:

- Opportunity to work with a leading team in British and European F4.
- Travel and accommodation provided during events.
- Competitive salary based on experience.

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- Mentor and inspire senior engineers fostering a culture of technical excellence and collaboration.
- Align cutting-edge engineering innovation with the company's strategic business goals.
- Ensure our technology remains at the forefront of industry advancements.

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Lola Cars, one of the world's iconic motorsport brands, and the most successful manufacturer of customer racing cars of all time. Since 1958, we have been building cars destined to win on the track.

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Lola Cars is a passionate and growing business specialising in the build of classic and vintage automobiles. We pride ourselves on our meticulous craftsmanship, attention to detail, and commitment to preserving automotive history.

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- Lead the assembly, servicing, and maintenance of race/road cars to exacting standards.
- Oversee pre-event preparations, including suspension setup, engine installation, and bodywork fit adjustments.

Trackside Support & Race Operations:

- Responsibility for the preparation, maintenance and set up of cars at events and tests.
- To attend all required events and to support build up and pack down of infrastructure.

Team Leadership & Training:

- Be an integral member of the team, assisting and supervising junior mechanics, providing training and technical guidance.
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To further strengthen our F1 Mechanical Design department, we are seeking a talented and experienced Mechanical Design Engineer to join our team in Maranello (Italy).

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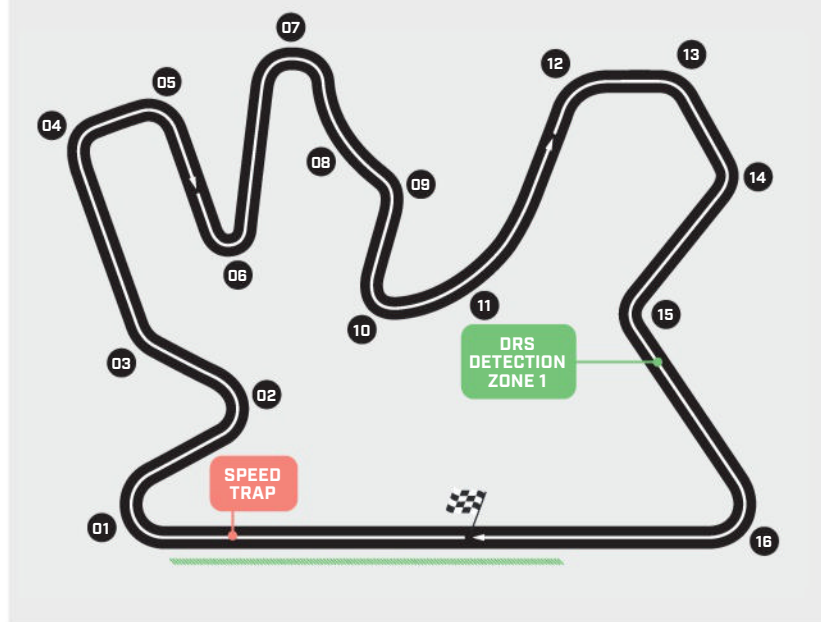


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QATAR GP

F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 23



WHILE MY QATAR GENTLY WEEPS SWEAT

Known as one of the more punishing races owing to its high heat and humidity, the Lusail circuit has produced a series of surprisingly good races across its three appearances on the F1 calendar. Although it was designed for motorbike racing rather than cars (and looks a little like a Salvador Dali sketch of a castle tower), the plethora of longer-radius, medium-high-speed corners lends itself to plenty of side-by-side action.

That's particularly the case in the opening corner and first sector. It's flat and smooth, allowing the teams to play

chicken with the surface when it comes to setting ride heights, while many of the kerbs are also incredibly aggressive – to the point where Pirelli may be well served in taking off-road tyres to contend with them. Expect plenty of track evolution as the weekend unfolds, and the wind to change the drivers' feel with each lap.

The 2023 race was infamous for its sweltering temperatures, conditions that forced Logan Sargeant to retire from the race. With F1's current heat-hazard rules, it should be a little less taxing – unless, of course, the cool-vests don't work.



Who remembers Pierre Gasly putting his AlphaTauri on the front row in 2021?

DEFODI IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES



RACE DATA

Venue	Lusail International Circuit
First GP	2021
GPs held	3
Circuit length	3.367 miles
Number of laps	57
Race distance	191.931 miles
Race lap record	1m22.384s Lando Norris (2024)
Pole lap record	1m20.575s George Russell (2024)
Most wins	Max Verstappen 2
Most poles	Lewis Hamilton, Max Verstappen & George Russell 1
Most starts	Verstappen, Norris, Gasly, Perez, Alonso, Leclerc, Stroll, Tsunoda, Ocon, Hamilton, Russell & Bottas 3

TIMETABLE (UK TIME)

Friday 28 November

Practice 1	1330-1430
Sprint qualifying	1730-1814

Saturday 29 November

Sprint	1400-1500
Qualifying	1800-1900

Sunday 30 November

Race	1600
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WHERE TO WATCH

Live coverage	Sky Sports F1
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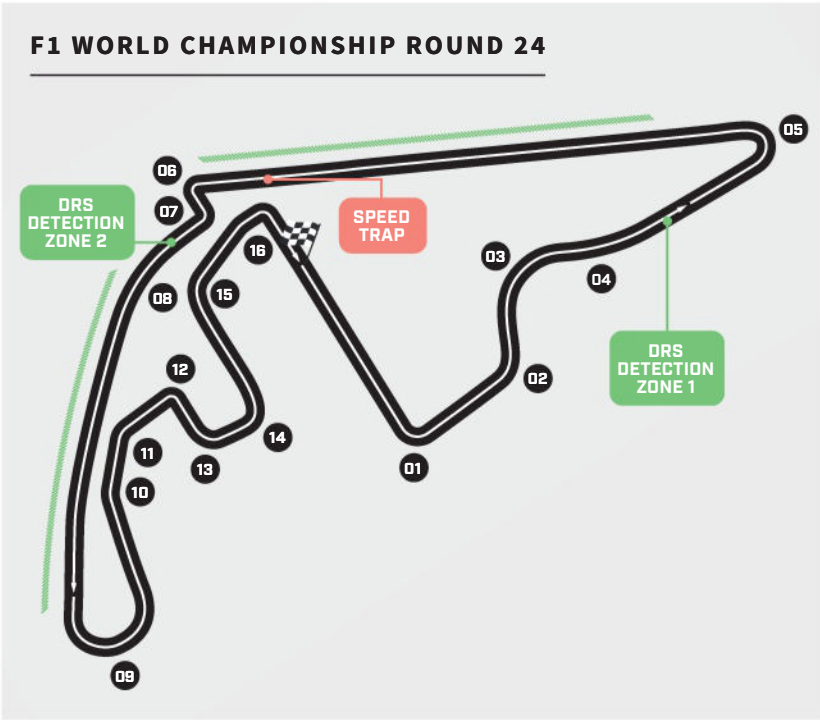
PREVIOUS WINNERS

2024	Max Verstappen	Red Bull (below)
2023	Max Verstappen	Red Bull
2021	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes



MORSE/NURPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES

ABU DHABI GP



THE ONLY WAY IS UP AT YAS

By now, we’ve become accustomed to Abu Dhabi’s presence as F1’s curtain closer – and to give the circuit its flowers, it has produced its fair share of intriguing title deciders through the years. We’ve had the 2010 decider, where Vitaly Petrov’s hold-up play helped Sebastian Vettel triumph over Fernando Alonso; the 2014 double-points battle between Lewis Hamilton and Nico Rosberg; Rosberg’s title success in the 2016 race; and, of course, the contentious 2021 showdown between Hamilton and Max Verstappen.

Perhaps rightly derided for its myriad

fiddly corners in its original layout, it was changed significantly for the 2021 race, arguably for the better. Beyond the lightly banked Turn 9, the rest of the final sector is quite one-note; too many off-camber corners around the W Hotel puts the field in lockstep, although these have at least been opened up in recent years.

Unless something goes wildly wrong for two of our title contenders, Yas should play host to another decider – hopefully free of any race directorial shenanigans. Then, after the small matter of a post-season test, it will be goodbye 2025.



RACE DATA

Venue	Yas Marina Circuit
First GP	2009
GPs held	16
Circuit length	3.281 miles
Number of laps	58
Race distance	190.324 miles
Race lap record	1m25.637s Kevin Magnussen (2024)
Pole lap record	1m22.109s Max Verstappen (2021)
Most wins	Lewis Hamilton 5
Most poles	Lewis Hamilton 5
Most starts	Lewis Hamilton 16

TIMETABLE (UK TIME)

Friday 5 December

Practice 1	0930-1030
Practice 2	1300-1400

Saturday 6 December

Practice 3	1030-1130
Qualifying	1400-1500

Sunday 7 December

Race	1300
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WHERE TO WATCH

Live coverage	Sky Sports F1
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PREVIOUS WINNERS

2024	Lando Norris	McLaren
2023	Max Verstappen	Red Bull
2022	Max Verstappen	Red Bull
2021	Max Verstappen	Red Bull
2020	Max Verstappen	Red Bull
2019	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes
2018	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes
2017	Valtteri Bottas	Mercedes
2016	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes
2015	Nico Rosberg	Mercedes



MACAU GRAND PRIX

MACAU GRAND PRIX

Formula Regional World Cup
Macau, China

15-16 November

Last year's inaugural running of the Macau Grand Prix to Formula Regional rules turned into a safety car-infested crashfest, so hopefully the 27-strong field (at time of going to press) will be taking their calm pills when they disembark at the legendary and unforgiving Guia circuit.

Prema Racing's British golden boy Freddie Slater arrives on a high as the newly crowned FR European champion, but his main 2025 opponents Matteo De Palo, Enzo Deligny and Evan Giltaire (who beat him to the Middle East crown) are all entered, while a smattering of Formula 3 aces are all stepping down to compete.

Fear not if you're stuck in the UK: the live stream provides some early-morning viewing, and you can put the kettle on while the safety car is out!



ROGER ALBERT CLARK RALLY

Carmarthen-Carlisle

20-24 November

In many ways, the Roger Albert Clark Rally is a blast from the past. The cars are historic, the route represents old-school, gruelling stage rallying through forests, and the event is packed with spectators. And that nostalgia factor is why fans and drivers love it. It has attracted nearly 200 entries, comprising a who's who of British rallying including BRC champions Mark Higgins, Osian Pryce and Matt Edwards, while Seb Perez's Lancia Stratos was the fan favourite last time. Contested over 310 miles, the biennial marathon begins in Wales before visiting England and Scotland.



FERRARO/LAT/GETTY IMAGES

Lusail, Qatar

29-30 November

Round 14/14

Yas Marina, UAE

6-7 December

FORMULA E

Round 1/11

Sao Paulo, Brazil

6 December

ASIAN LE MANS SERIES

Round 1/3

Sepang, Malaysia

13-14 December

BRANDS HATCH MSVR

IndyKa 500, Miata Trophy, Allcomers/Clio Cup GB, Trackday (Championship, Trophy)

15-16 November

GT WORLD CUP

Macau, China

15-16 November

TCR WORLD TOUR

Round 8/8

Macau, China

15-16 November

AUSTRALIAN SUPERCARS

Round 12/13

Sandown, Australia

15-16 November

Round 13/13

Adelaide, Australia

28-30 November

SUPER FORMULA

Round 7/7

Suzuka, Japan

22-23 November

F1 ACADEMY

Round 7/7

Las Vegas, USA

21-22 November

WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Round 14/14

Rally Saudi Arabia

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

27-29 November

FORMULA 2

Round 13/14

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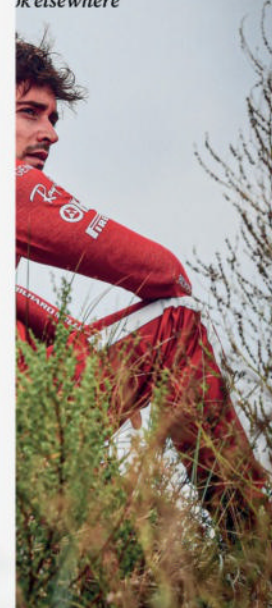
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THE TRUTH ABOUT THE
GROUND-EFFECT ERA

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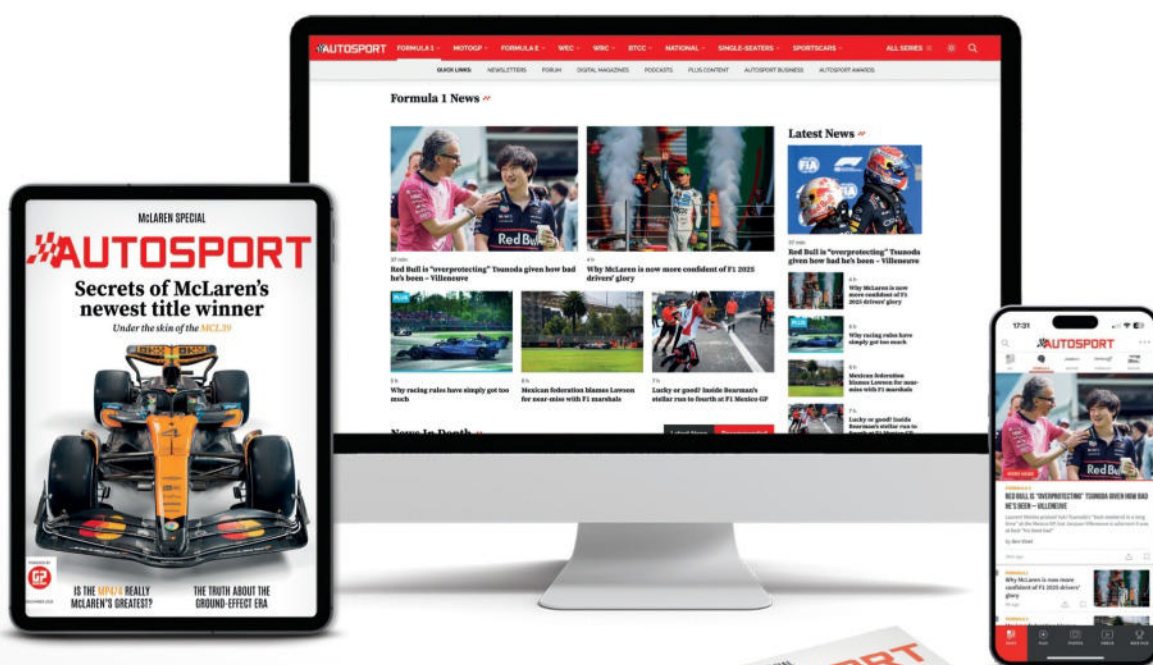
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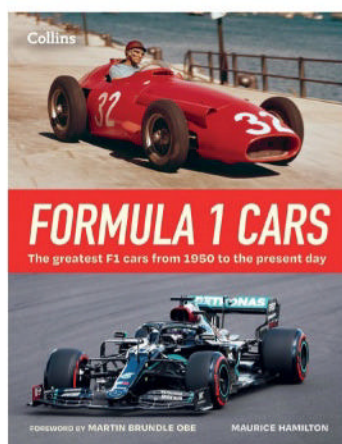


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FORMULA 1 CARS: THE GREATEST F1 CARS FROM 1950 TO THE PRESENT DAY

collins.co.uk

RRP £30

From the prolific pen of Autosport columnist Maurice Hamilton comes this compendium of great grand prix cars spanning the history of the world championship. Each one of the selected 50 represents innovation and historic significance as well as great speed. Maurice delivers the inside line on the creative geniuses behind these cars as well as the daring pilots who drove them.



IL FASCINO FERRARI

taschen.com

RRP £125

Originally released in a limited-edition case modelled after Testa Rossa cylinder-head covers, and individually numbered and signed by Piero Ferrari himself, this 700-page epic from luxury publisher Taschen is now available in slightly less rarefied form. What a piece of work it is. Edited by Pino Allievi, the doyenne of Italian motor racing

journalists, and featuring photography by legends Louis Klemantaski, Jesse Alexander and Rainer Schlegelmilch, it's a richly appointed homage to the history and stature of the Maranello marque.

Within the lavishly illustrated pages you'll find details of Enzo Ferrari's life, both before and after he founded his eponymous company, and comprehensive details of road and race models

dating from 1940 (the two Auto Avio Costruzioni 815s) to 2024.

Allievi and Taschen benefited from the close co-operation of Ferrari so, in addition to the photography from famous archives, this work features many previously unseen photographs, sketches and documents from Ferrari's private archives. Be warned: it weighs in at 6kg so you will be in need of a stout coffee table to accommodate it.



ORIENT STAR M45 F7 WATCH

orientwatch.co.uk

RRP £1599.99-£1699.99

Japanese watch maker Orient Star has added two new regular models and a limited (to 190 pieces) edition to its popular M45 F7 Mechanical Moon Phase line-up, named after the star cluster M45 Pleiades and themed after the passage of time. Across all the new models the appearance of the moon phase itself has been

revised to have the deep blue colouring of the evening sky, with even brighter stars.

All three models feature the semi-skeleton design showcasing the inner workings of the movement. The limited edition features a new light blue dial treatment. Roman numerals on the dial give a classically elegant look and feel, and the automatic movement (with hand winding) has a power reserve up to 50 hours.

HOT WHEELS F1 2025

mattel.com

RRP From £2.30

Mattel chose the Mexican Grand Prix to stage a significant development to its officially licensed Hot Wheels F1 range. Sergio Perez unveiled the latest cars to join the range: the 2025 grid is now complete with Ferrari and Aston Martin arriving this December.

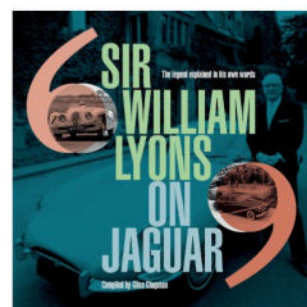
Crafted at 1:64 scale, the

Hot Wheels F1 collection

Premium models come with metal bodies and chassis, authentic and detailed racing liveries, driver-specific helmets, and Real Riders tyres. The product line-up includes individual cars and multi-car assortments, along with specialised packaging and display plinths for those who wish to collect and cherish rather than subject

to the rigours of play.

At the same scale but more play-oriented – so probably more appropriate for recreating Max Verstappen-style first-corner overtaking manoeuvres – the Singles collection starts at £2.30 each and is highly suitable for racing, either on existing tracks or the F1-specific Sprint Race and Grand Prix Race circuits released earlier on this year.



SIR WILLIAM LYONS ON JAGUAR

evropublishing.com

RRP £50

In April 1969, Jaguar founder Sir William Lyons gave a speech at the Institute of the Motor Industry. The printed schedule described it as “The History of Jaguar and the Future of the Specialised Car in the British Motor Industry”. He had just launched the XJ6 saloon. Here the speech is, in full, as unearthed by motoring journalist Giles Chapman.

Sir William was not one to seek personal exposure or put himself about for interviews, so this is an unusually personal and candid account of how he built Jaguar, and what made the cars so very special. His grandson, Michael Quinn, furnishes the introduction while Chapman neatly wraps everything in context with an epilogue that sums up Sir William’s legacy and the future of the Jaguar brand.



MEISTERSTÜCK GREAT MASTERS FERRARI TAILOR MADE CLASSICA SPECIAL EDITION

store.ferrari.com
RRP £3035

Cast yourself in the mould of Enzo Ferrari himself with this elegant Montblanc fountain pen, which aims to bring you on an “evocative journey through colours, materials and components that revisit Ferrari’s coveted vintage creations”.

The mahogany barrel, inlaid with a black lacquer stripe, is intended to evoke the tactile steering wheel of a vintage Ferrari sports car. The cross-hatch pattern on the platinum-coated forepart cone and top cap are similarly modelled on the wheel’s metal spokes. A rhodium-coated solid gold nib keeps the ink of inspiration flowing.



POCHER PORSCHE 917K MARTINI

uk.pocher.com
RRP £809.99

Few vehicles cause the Autosport team to salivate as much as Porsche 917. Pocher’s new limited-edition die-cast model kit meticulously recreates the fabulous bolide with which Gijs van Lennep and Helmut Marko won the 1971 Le Mans 24 Hours. This being the end of the mighty five-litre engine era, the duo set a speed record that would stand for decades. Just 12 cars were classified as finishers and the winning Porsche also finished second in



CARRERA REVELL F1

Carrera-toys.com
RRP From £49.99

An action-packed Christmas is guaranteed with Carrera’s F1 collection. The 2025 F1 season range begins with Pull & Speed pullback-and-go cars in 1:43

scale. Shifting up a gear, Carrera GO!!! offers adrenalin-fuelled slot race action with the latest cars, turbo-assisted controllers and a modular/expandable track system.

Supersize to 1:32 scale with Carrera Digital 132,

with an even more realistic appearance and the possibility of drifting through corners. Track is modular and can be expanded with digitised features for a more immersive race experience.



TIMEX DFW NATO STRAP WATCH

shop.astonmartinf1.com
RRP £265.50

Alongside the BAT silicon bangle (RRP £53), Timex has launched an Aston Martin F1-themed version of its DFW Nato Strap Watch. The 43mm case is carbon fibre, set beneath domed mineral glass, and the dial features dual square counters with accents in Aston’s official colours of green and lime. The pushers and crown take their cue from race lights – styled in red, amber and green – while the Nato strap offers a high-grip texture.

the Index of Thermal Efficiency.

Part model, part collectors' item, and beautifully engineered at a large 1:8 scale, the kit includes over 316 high-quality pre-decorated parts and showcases working suspension, fully functional steering, plus opening doors and clamshell engine cover. The finished model measures over 50cm long so it will make an impressive centrepiece for an enthusiast's display cabinet.

Build time is estimated in the region of 30 hours so you will be deserving of a bottle of champagne once you get it across the finishing line: like the original 917, this takes a lot of commitment but is hugely rewarding to master.



REFLO WILLIAMS TRAVELWEAR

reflo.com

RRP From £38

Sustainable performance-wear brand Reflo has teamed up with Williams to launch a travelwear collection made from recycled materials. It features unisex T-shirts and men's and women's polos, plus versatile staples such as gilets and hoodies, and a breathable lightweight quarter-zip pullover. A waterproof jacket is engineered to handle the elements.

In the T-shirt collection you'll find items devoted to each driver, plus more universal designs featuring nods to technology and the team's racing history.



POWERSPORT LEGENDS T-SHIRTS

powersportlegends.com

RRP £20

Celebrate history's greatest F1 drivers with these T-shirts of champions. The popular T-shirts from the Powersport Legends clothing and gift range showcase the helmets of the sport's most legendary drivers. Available in black, white and charcoal, the designs can also be had as sweatshirts and hoodies.

From pub to pitlane, these T-shirts will turn heads and enable aficionados to boast that they know their Stewarts from their Hills, and their Hunts from their Fittipaldis. And that's just the Grand Prix Helmets tee. The Modern Helmets tee also features a few which could be slightly more challenging for non-fans to identify, but that's what happens when you start letting drivers change them every weekend. Sizes range from small all the way up to XXXXL.



The BAMFORD FERRARI SPECIALS



THE BAMFORD FERRARI SPECIALS

porterpress.co.uk

RRP £40

Earth-moving equipment magnate Lord Anthony Bamford started his extraordinary car collection in the 1960s and he has a particular liking for Ferraris. Famously, he managed to acquire a handful of 246 Dino engines and gearboxes from Maranello inventory in the early 1970s and commissioned several recreations of a historically important racing car that had fallen victim to Ferrari's policy of unsympathetic disposal of previous racing projects.

He also commissioned three bespoke Ferrari road car 'specials'. This book charts their creation and features interviews with Lord Bamford himself, as well as the engineers and craftsmen who built the specials. As well as previously unpublished images, it features new photo shoots by renowned photographer David Shepherd.

STAR CARS FOR SALE

*F1 and endurance racers – including two real beauties –
are on our wish list this month*



1991 JORDAN 191

Jordan's first Formula 1 car was beautiful and competitive, allowing Eddie Jordan's team to finish fifth in the 1991 constructors' championship. Chassis 6 was first raced by Andrea de Cesaris, who took it to seventh in the Hungarian Grand Prix, but its most-famous moment came next time out at Spa. Regular driver Bertrand Gachot was unavailable due to an 'altercation' with a taxi driver and Mercedes sportscar star Michael Schumacher stepped in for his first F1 race. Schumacher went eighth fastest on the Friday in this car before swapping to chassis 5 and stunning the establishment by qualifying seventh. De Cesaris was running second in chassis 6 when the engine failed. Used as a spare car for the rest of 1991, chassis 6 was driven by Schumacher's son Mick for a track test in 2021.

1997 SAUBER C16

Another of F1's heroic minnows from the 1990s, Sauber sometimes punched above its weight. The C16 was a consistent points challenger in 1997 – when only the top six scored – and recorded a podium thanks to Johnny Herbert's third place in the Hungarian GP. Sauber finished seventh in the standings that year. Chassis C16-04, which has been fully restored and still has its original Petronas/Ferrari V10 engine, was taken to 10th place in the Canadian GP by Gianni Morbidelli. It was also the C16 driven by then-Ferrari driver and future seven-time world champion Michael Schumacher during a secret Fiorano test in September 1997.





1985 LANCIA LC2

To call the LC2 a glorious failure might be a tad harsh, but rarely has a car achieved iconic status off such limited success. It's the sight and sound of Lancia's Group C machine that captured the imagination. First arriving in 1983, factory-run versions of the Ferrari V8 twin-turbo-powered car took on Porsche for four seasons. It proved rapid – poles were numerous and included Bob Wollek's at Le Mans in 1984 – but it was not as fuel-efficient or reliable as its German rival and won just two world sportscar championship races. Chassis 0007, now in 1986 spec, was the last LC2 built and was raced across 1985-86, scoring two poles and two podium finishes.

2000 CADILLAC NORTHSTAR LMP

Cadillac made a factory assault on sportscar racing at the start of the millennium and this Riley & Scott-built LMP900 was its contender for 2000. The fourth of seven built, this car raced at the Daytona 24 Hours and Sebring 12 Hours before being driven to 22nd at the Le Mans 24 Hours by Max Angelelli, Wayne Taylor and Eric van de Poele. The same trio took the car to seventh at Petit Le Mans before it was upgraded to LMP-01 specification for 2001. Run by DAMS, the twin-turbo V8-powered machine finished 15th at Le Mans and, under the Team Cadillac banner, took three fourth-placed finishes in the American Le Mans Series.



LANCIA D50

The Vittorio Jano-penned Lancia D50, complete with pannier fuel tanks and 2.5-litre V8 power, is one of the great F1 designs. Only a lack of funding and lead driver Alberto Ascari's death in a sportscar crash prevented Lancia from challenging the Mercedes W196 during 1955, but the cars got another chance when they were handed over to Ferrari. With Mercedes gone, Ferrari-run D50s dominated 1956, Juan Manuel Fangio taking three wins on his way to the title. Nearly half a century later, D50 004(R) was built in Italy using many original parts and with support from Lancia.



Senna sees off Mansell's charge

You might be forgiven for thinking that Nigel Mansell's two-armed celebration after finishing runner-up in a grand prix he had seemed nailed on to win was a little overegged, but he knows he's just delivered one of the drives of

his life. He had been untouchable in his Williams at Monaco in 1992 – until he pitted with a wheel problem, handing the lead to the McLaren of Ayrton Senna. What followed was a dazzling seven-lap fightback, countered by an equally

heroic defence from the Brazilian, who said: "I knew he would try everything, and all I could do was try to stay on the road – and in the right place." Mansell: "I thought I saw three McLarens in front of me, but no sour grapes. That's racing."



Photographer Rainer Schlegelmilch/
Getty Images

Where Monte Carlo, Monaco
When Sunday 31 May 1992



BARNI/ATPIMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

F1's strangest race ends an era

16 December 2021

Whether you're a Lewis Hamilton fan, Max Verstappen follower or a neutral, it's hard to argue against the significance of the 2021 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. Not only did it decide one of the most intense championship battles in Formula 1 history, it led to a key figure losing his job, a rule change, and caused some of the most toxic 'debate' seen since the days of Ayrton Senna and Alain Prost.

"Unbelievable," said Autosport's cover on 16 December 2021. It was actually a quote from Verstappen about landing his first F1 crown, but summed up the events of the 22nd round of the 2021 world championship rather well.

After a disgraceful race in Saudi Arabia, Verstappen arrived on equal points with Hamilton but with the advantage by virtue of having taken nine GP wins to the Mercedes driver's eight. If neither finished, the title would be Verstappen's. The Red Bull ace comfortably beat Hamilton to pole but lost out at the start, despite being on soft-compound tyres to the Briton's mediums. The Dutchman could afford to be aggressive and dived down the

inside at Turn 6. Hamilton turned out of the impending accident and took to the run-off, cleverly avoiding a penalty by backing off just enough after rejoining while maintaining the lead.

Thereafter the Mercedes pulled away. Verstappen closed after the pitstops thanks to some great defence by team-mate Sergio Perez against Hamilton, but just didn't seem to have enough pace. When a virtual safety car was called, Red Bull brought in Verstappen for another stop, putting on a second set of hards. This helped him nibble into Hamilton's lead when the race went green, but even the Red Bull driver reckoned "I wouldn't have caught him". With just six of the 58 laps to go, Hamilton was still 11.9s ahead.

Then Nicholas Latifi crashed his Williams, leaving enough mess to require the safety car. Red Bull brought Verstappen in again – for softs – while Mercedes regarded a stop as too risky given it had track position. Had the race finished under yellows, as had happened before, that would have been that, but such a scenario would have been something of an anti-climax to such a dramatic year. Initially, race director Michael Massi said that the five lapped cars between Hamilton and Verstappen would not be waved through to take their place at the back of the queue. But following lobbying from Red Bull, that decision was reversed and Verstappen was able to move right up behind Hamilton in time for a one-lap dash for the flag.

Crucially, other cars weren't waved through, which was one of the causes of controversy – it seemed a hitherto unprecedented situation had been allowed to happen to enable the title protagonists to be together *and* for there to be time for a restart. Had the FIA broken its own rules? From an entertainment point of view, the move made some sense, but from a sporting one it put Hamilton on the back foot in circumstances Mercedes could be forgiven for not anticipating. On old hard tyres Hamilton had no chance when Verstappen launched his attack on the final tour and the Red Bull crossed the line 2.3 seconds ahead.

The title was Verstappen's and the Hamilton-Mercedes era was over. So, soon, was Massi's tenure as race director – and the unrestricted access teams had to race control. Both Verstappen and Hamilton would have been worthy champions in 2021, but most enthusiasts hope that the world title is never again decided by such unprecedented decisions in race control.

KEVIN TURNER



TEE/LAT/GETTY IMAGES



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ON SALE 19 DECEMBER

F1 2025 REVIEW

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